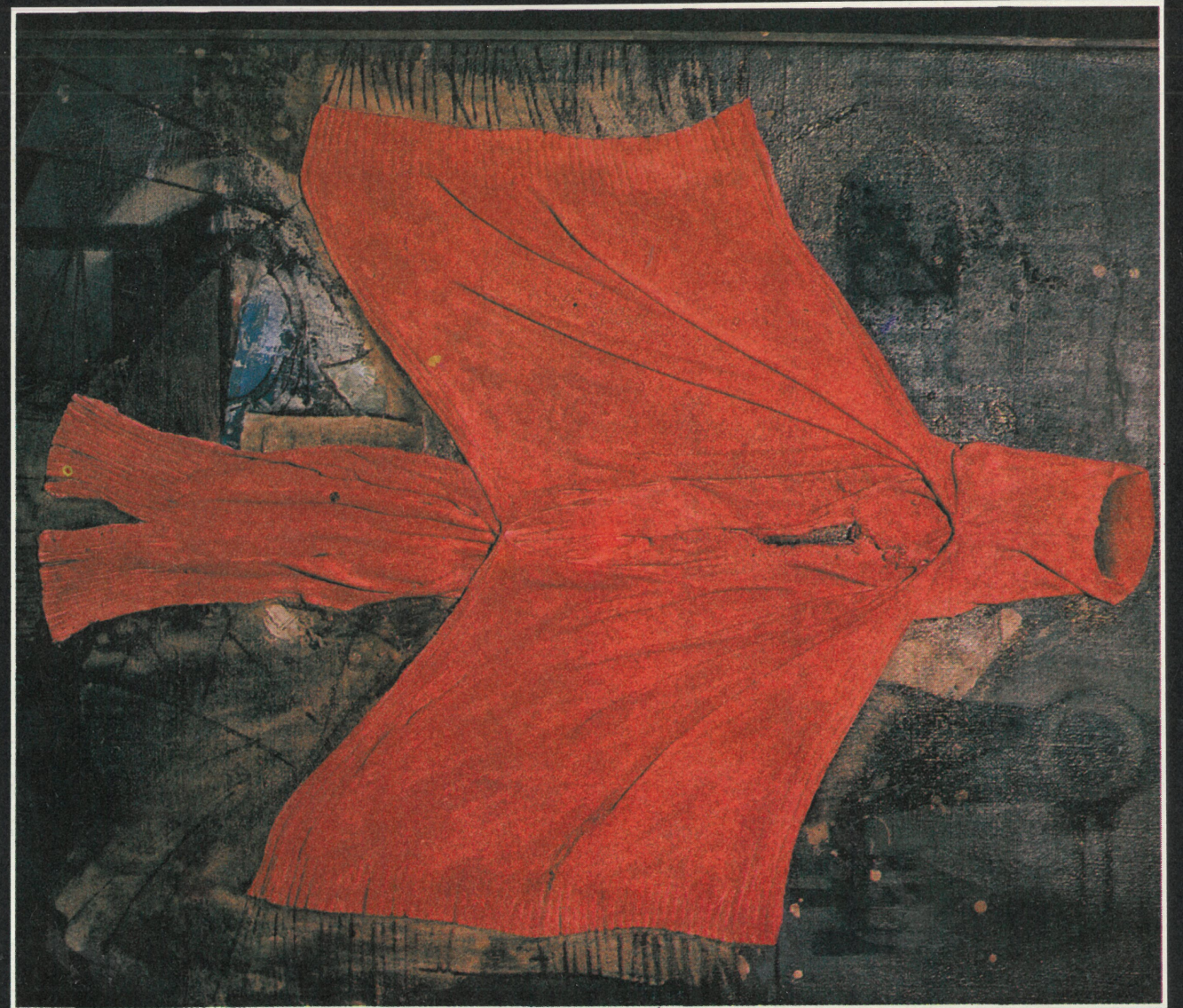


# GILGAMESH

A Journal of Modern Iraqi Arts



2-1986





## First Issue: Positive Response

By Naji Al-Hadithi

"It gives the reader a good insight into Iraqi culture," said one American scholar describing the first issue of *Gilgamesh*. This is on the credit side. But on the debit one, there will be certain design, production and editorial flaws which our esteemed scholar as well as a number of Iraqi literary men and scholars have pointed to. However, we, the staff and advisors, were determined to make a step forward in the second issue, and hope we have done it.

The magazine was received well by all Iraqis concerned, persons of letters, artists, musicians, dramatists, scholars, etc. They felt that this would be a good medium for acquainting foreign readers with Iraqis' creativity and innovation. Indeed, they feel a great need to communicate with the outside world since the whole atmosphere in the country is oriented towards more healthy interaction between the national experience in various arts with those of humanity in general.

Testifying to this almost recurrent aspect of Iraqi cultural scene are two major cultural events, the Baghdad International Art Festival, October 26-November 1, 1986 and the Al-Mirbad Poetry Festival November 22- December 1, 1986. In both events, a large number of Iraqi intellectuals together with many intellectuals from Arab and foreign countries have taken part. Such activities are in fact part of an overall process of care, encouragement and promotion which Iraq's leader, President Saddam Hussein has been attending to in such a manner that would generate more contribution by intellectuals to creating a more beautiful life and brighter prospects for the future of man in this thorough-bred country.

Some reports in this issue dealt with those two events which will be wholly covered in next issues. Other materials are designed to acquaint the readers with more aspects of Iraq's cultural life.



# GILGAMESH

Published by Dar al-Ma'mun for Translation and Publishing  
Ministry of Information and Culture Karradat Mariam, Baghdad - Iraq  
P.O. Box 24015. Tel. 5383171. Telex 212984 MAMUN IK.

Front cover : Kadhem Hayder, *Oil* Inside front cover : Kenneth Armittage, *Sculpture*  
Back Cover : Edwardo Paoloszi, *Sculpture* Inside back cover : Talal Issa, *Sculpture*  
The last three items were shown at the Baghdad International Art Festival. (Photos by Abdulla Hassoon).  
Poetry and short story drawings by Ala Basheer

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# GILGAMESH

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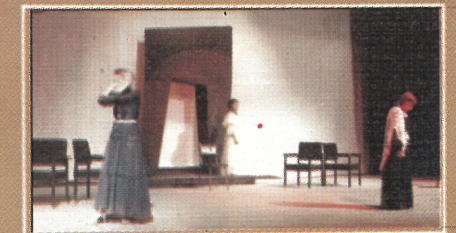
7 The late Kadhem Hayder was a leading Iraqi artist with many talents. Though he worked as a stage designer, he was better known as an experimentalist painter who dealt with life and death through legendary symbols. His style is a blend of folk art, heritage, the American Pop-Art School and stage technical elements.



59 A leading critic once described the "conventional" group of Iraqi story writers as lacking in artistry and knowledge and dismissed most of their work as "daily reports of the kind we find at police stations." Dr. Al-Musawi tries to discuss this and other views of the Iraqi short story in the 1950s.



65 The period 1921-1958 is a critical stage in the history of the Iraqi theatre. Many laws which were related directly to theatre were enacted during this period. A number of theatrical troupes clashed frequently with the authorities.



83 More than 230 artists representing 50 countries gathered in Baghdad from October 26 to November 1 in what is believed to be among the important art events in the world. *Art for Humanity* was the theme of the Baghdad International Art Festival in which more than 650 works of art were displayed. Big prizes were awarded to distinguished works.



Price: ID 1/- US\$ 4.00





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## Kadhem Hayder 1932-1985

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### Portrait of an Artist

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By Farouq Yousif

There is a strange harmony between Kadhem Hayder's works and the theme of death. Such a theme might look bleak and nightmarish to many people, but with Kadhem Hayder it was different. He tried to evoke memories related to death with a great deal of courage and intimacy.

No Iraqi painter or intellectual has been so intimate with death as was Kadhem Hayder. None of them has ever used the theme of death as a basic element of his aesthetic and expressive works as did Kadhem Hayder. Moreover none of them has tried to reveal the life that lies behind the mask of death as this painter has.

Kadhem Hayder was an exceptional case among a group of nihilistic artists who saw life lying stiff while death was the only moving nerve in the corpse of life.

He found out that the only weapon with which he could courageously face up to death was death itself. He believed that man should defend his freedom through death rather than life. The painter did not resurrect death to create a black joke or to make the viewer get involved in a fabricated dilemma. Death was present before his eyes whenever it broke off ties with objects and established its own civilisation of blood and earth to which the universe would finally return. Time for Kadhem Hayder covered the bloody moments which existed through upsetting and interrupting the familiar rhythm.

It seems that the only moment he discovered his own nature was when he revealed the rich, creative, and noble aspect of death, as it lies in death itself. In this connection only martyrdom could express this

kind of view towards existence as a whole. To him martyr was synonym to the man standing alone in the heart of the universe and martyrdom was the sole act through which an individual could achieve his human nature. Kadhem Hayder portrayed life by using masks, actors and colourful backgrounds. The conflict of all these elements materialized the tragedy of life which was renewed by the presence of brightness and darkness, good and evil, and space and mass. Such vigorous tragedy along with its absolute potentials penetrated through time to become a constant element of place.

Therefore, Kadhem Hayder was indifferent to time. He used symbols to refer to it at a specific place. By this he could tackle a limited event by the use of a wide scope of signs and symbols.

This view of death influenced his understanding of freedom, an element about which he was concerned more than anything else in his life. Freedom was the motive, the concern and the goal that he tried to achieve through his works on the intellectual, stylistic and technical levels. This made Kadhem Hayder become a leading experimental painter.

Kadhem Hayder was prompted by an irresistible desire to embark on modernization. He applied various styles and thoughts by utilizing the power of his versatile mind as well as his unmatched skill.

As a result Kadhem Hayder became the type of artist who was in a constant struggle with himself in an attempt to gain victory over what he had previously accomplished. He also endeavoured to reveal new aspects of his thought, contemplation, and stylistic and technical potentials.



The works of art that Kadhem Hayder accomplished through a number of stages were significant. But he did not remain a prisoner of these works because of the concern that lied in the depth of his heart. The important thing for him was to use these works of art as a means to know himself better.

Kadhem Hayder was at his best when he died. Death came to him after he had spent all his life gaining victory over it through his works. He resorted extensively to the use of legendary symbols, both past and present. Most of these symbols portrayed man who appeared more impressive than any other subject.

Since the mid 1950s Kadhem Hayder raised the question of contemporary man and his crisis. He

particularly tackled that aspect which is related to man's symbolic conflict with death as well as his realistic fight against its causes. This stage in the life of this painter was crowned with such works of art in which man, the individual, appeared inside one or more cubes. Man was an expression of besieged freedom. In Kadhem Hayder's paintings man did not represent the group's apparant contentment that is related to their inter-relation and living structure. Instead man expressed hidden contentment which a number of historic conditions and people conspired to cover up.

Kadhem Hayder tried to express this idea through the use of masks. This is because he was fond of theatre. He designed the decors of many significant

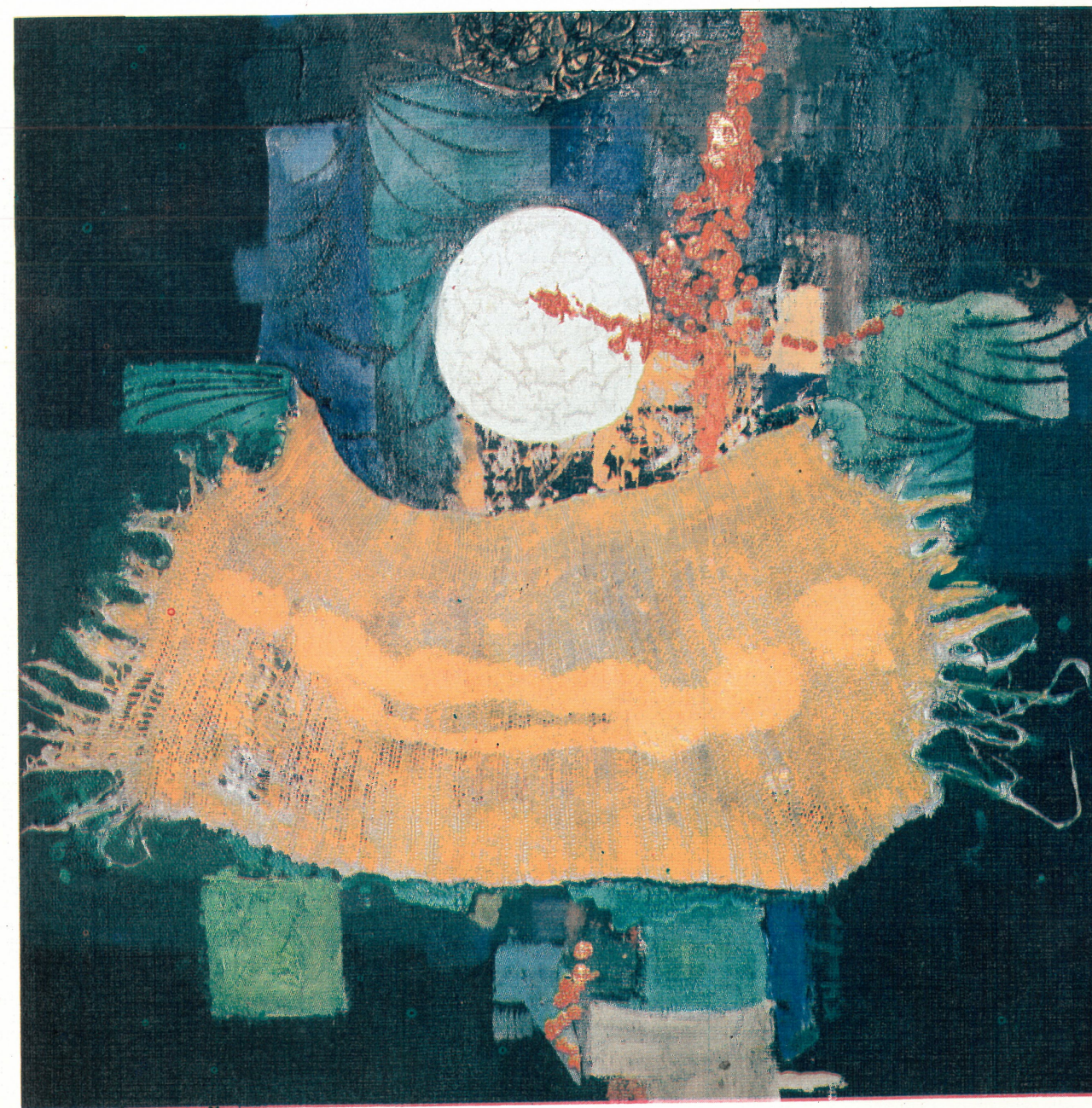
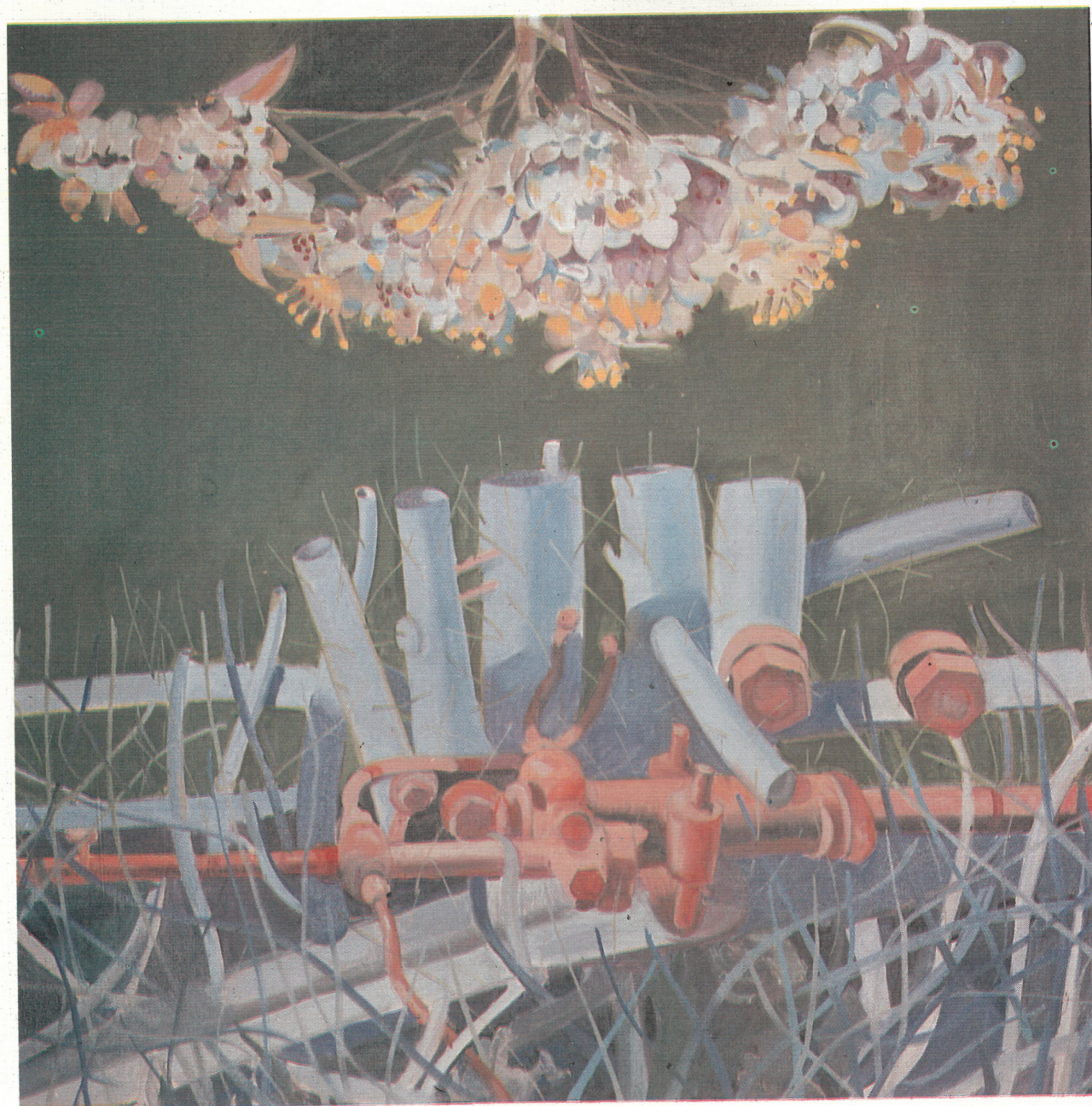
plays that were received with acclaim by the audience in Iraq, and had a role in the development of Iraqi theatre. One of his brilliant ideas in this respect was to make the curtains of the stage visible. By this approach he attempted to make the viewer believe that the most important and vital act of life was that taking place behind the scenes. In order to transfer this idea into painting, the artist left a number of spaces on the surface of his paintings to show that more technical care is needed.

For him the surface of a painting was just like actors' faces subjected to the brush of the make-up artist.

The idea that "life or an act of life always lies in the depth or in the invisible part of an object" was

one of the major ideas that Kadhem Hayder tried to follow and apply. Sometimes he painted scenes from nature in an attempt to catch his breath and recover his ability to tackle the inner elements of life more accurately and more impressively.

In the depth of hidden moments of life man stood encircled by the threat of defiance. In other words the painter did not use the idea of encirclement to ascertain man's apparant isolation and drive him to the state of despair. On the contrary he endeavoured to reveal man's strength in facing up to his tragedy. Adel Kamel, an arts critic tried to explain this in his statement about Kadhem Hayder, "It is an expression of man's fear of the unknown, of his surroundings, and of his consciousness. It is also an express-





ion of man's confinement by social, psychological and political conditions." Such state can also be explained as man's attempt to maintain his survival beyond time.

Through his paintings Kadhem Hayder presented a different concept of originality. Earlier *The Baghdad Group for Modern Art*, the first Group which dealt with art in a contemporary manner, presented originality as an attempt to search for local roots in heritage. But Kadhem Hayder believed that originality interpreted the condition of man facing challenges by his own internal power.

As a result stylistic and technical changes did not obstruct artist's search for originality. Kadhem Hayder's style was a blend of folk arts, heritage, the American Pop-Art School, and stage technical elements.

This approach represented the painter's concern and attitude towards future. It also showed how intimate he was to the essential sense of life.

An excellent example of this idea can be found in Kadhem Hayder's works of art which he put on display in Beirut in 1965 under the theme *The Martyr's Epic*. This was an outstanding one-man exhibition in the history of modern Iraqi art.

Through resorting to heritage he endeavoured to discover the constant elements that govern man's movement beyond time and place. Kadhem Hayder did not in fact respect the physical idea of time. In 1974 he presented two works of art. The first included a great number of clocks under the theme *Beyond Time*, and the second was entitled *5 o'clock + 7 o'clock = Zero*.

Kadhem Hayder did not call for evoking heritage as Jawad Salim and the artists who followed him did. He instead sought to revive man's overall movements through the use of specific past events which are related directly to man's continuous attempts to defend his principles, and the vigour which is

derived from the history of his creative act. In this connection the legend of the *Battle of Kerbala* whose main theme was martyrdom represented a door widely open to life instead of death.

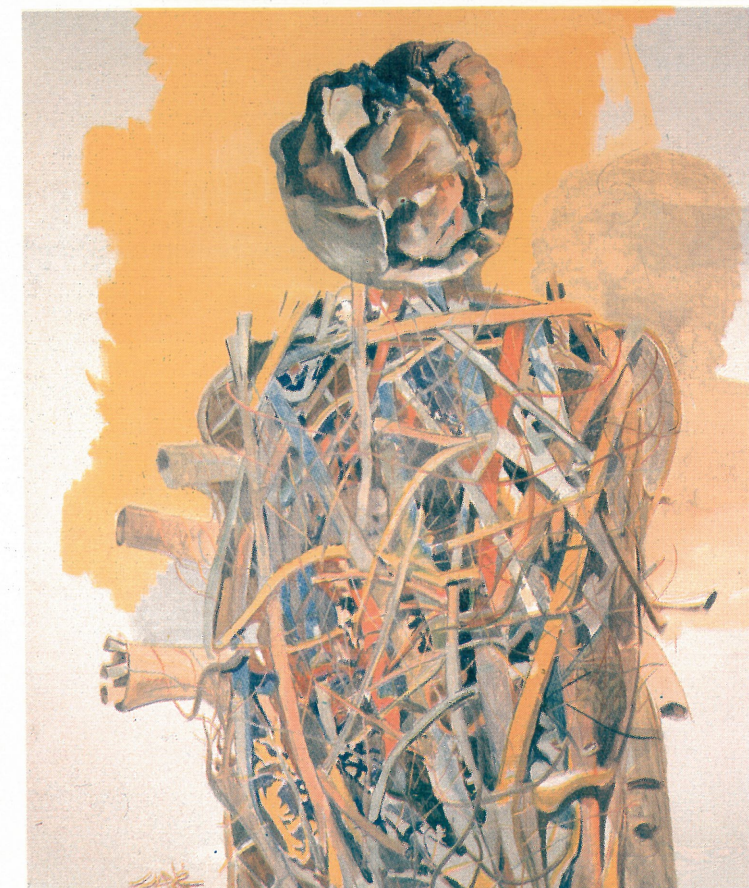
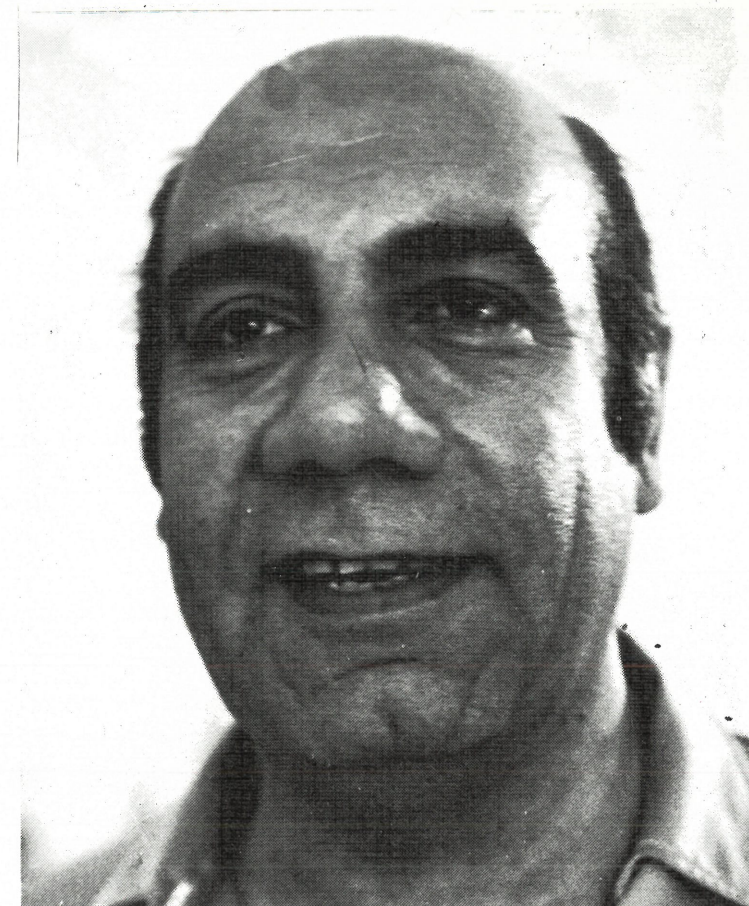
The painter used the theme of martyrdom as a positive dialogue with death rather than a mere negative response to it. In this way Kadhem Hayder defended the causes behind life through reviving the Arab-Islamic heritage. He used the idea of sacred death as materialized by martyrdom.

Therefore death in Kadhem Hayder's opinion was not a horrifying maze. Death in his works was clear and vigorous despite its harshness and ruthlessness. Martyrdom was not an attempt to attain man's salvation. It was rather a means ascertaining man's relation to life with its hidden sense including principles, masks, roots and capability to interpret a genuine act.

However, his most important concern was to be free. He did not want to be restricted by a certain idea or style. He portrayed strain regardless of the time and place in which it took place. He used a variety of symbols uprooted from their time and planted as universal concepts.

In his works he would shift swiftly from horses, swords, tents and desert to cages, masks and stage curtains. In doing so he would not find any harm in using wires, magazines' clippings, plastic and various pieces of wood. This is for certain a testimony to this artist's love for freedom.

This also ascertains his concern for and fear of being related to something hidden that dragged him to various directions. But what confuses this supposition is the fact that Kadhem Hayder was a committed painter. His works revealed his confidence in man, adherence to hope, profound understanding of the causes of life and his absolute faith in man's capability to show positive defiance.



#### Profile

\* Born in 1932

\* Graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts, Painting Department, Baghdad, in 1957.

\* Graduated from the Central College, London, in 1962, specializing in lithography, and stage decoration.

\* Held his outstanding exhibition in Beirut in 1965 under the theme *The Martyr's Epic*.

\* Founder of *The Academic Group* in 1971.

\* Held one-man exhibition at the Iraqi Cultural Centre in London in 1984.

\* Participated in a number of group exhibitions.

\* Died in December 1985 after a long illness.





A drawing by Rafa Al-Nasiri

# Modern Iraqi Artist and Poetry

By May Mudhaffar



A drawing by Jawad Salim

In his *History of Italian Painting*, Stendhal believes that "painting is essentially a system of moral values made visible"<sup>(1)</sup> Perhaps the same may be said of all arts; they are always beauty expressed by every individual feeling, passion and dreams. In short it is variety in unity.

If arts, in general, tend to reinforce each other, poetry is essentially related to visual art, the relation between art and poetry has its deep roots in the history of Arab culture. It primarily manifested its link through the art of calligraphy which reached its accomplished stage sometime during the 4th century of Al-Hijra (around the 10th century A.D.) when its rules and basis were developed and established by Ibn Mugla.

Calligraphy was very much related to Islamic architecture; verses from the holy Quran were often seen decorating the facades as well as the interiors of buildings.

Later, other decorative elements were also applied using characters such as plants, birds and arabesque. Calligraphy, therefore served to create both a verbal and an aesthetic effect.

When paper reached the Arabs, miniature and arabesque were soon introduced to the art of book-making along with the inscribed text. In a recent exhibition of rare Arab manuscripts, held at the Iraqi Museum, visitors were allowed to observe an accomplished art involving different styles showing a mixture of influences. One such influence was the Baghdad School of Art which emerged as a distinguished characteristic style. Paper allowed Arab Islamic artists to perform their expressive potentials through live colour, gesture and portraiture surrounded by decorative elements of abstract nature. These composed images which usually borrow their particulars from literary texts, were in fact a true reflection of actual life. Figuration in Islamic art was not a novelty in those books, as figurative



compositions since the early centuries of Islam were seen on the walls of Caliphs' palaces such as Samarra Palace (Iraq) and Qusair Amrah (Jordan).<sup>(2)</sup>

Among the many unknown artists of book decoration, the name of Yehya al-Wasiti left its signature on a number of fabulous books the most famous of which is *Maqamat Al Hariri*.<sup>(3)</sup> Al-Wasiti who is said to have headed one of the many Baghdad schools of art, was not simply a book decorator. He was a competent artist and a man endowed with hyper sensitivity to social errors. He was capable of creating a composition. Though based originally on the accounts referred to in the text, it would enhance the meaning and elaborate on the actions performed by the characters through high aesthetic qualities. His sense of drama, humour observations and knowledge intervened entirely with the framework of the literary text to create a fabulous image.

The drawings of Al-Wasiti were in fact a study of human behaviour; Al-Wasiti, therefore, introduced to art what Poussin discovered later in the 17th century. Influenced by drama and epic poetry, Poussin rebelled against the idealism of art and established a more realistic value believing that painting, like poetry, should be "an imitation of human action."<sup>(4)</sup>

If drama has a poetic value in the work of art, colour is an element that has great significance to

human feelings. It also has its intellectual and emotional significance when it becomes relevant to other surrounding colours. Dr. Tharwat Ukasha believes that "transformation in colour realized by Al-Wasiti through his use of a limited number of tones is one of the deceptive qualities in his drawings."<sup>(5)</sup> He confirms that "the expressive language of colours, whether instinctively or intentionally applied, depends on the interplay between such colours within the composition."<sup>(6)</sup>

This statement may lead us to a similar discovery by Dryden in the 17th-century England. In his famous essay, *Parallel of Poetry and Painting*, Dryden explains that, "colours, whether as figurative language or as figments of a painter, were simply the appropriate means in each art whereby reality could be transformed into the heightened nature in which lay the very force and power of all art."<sup>(7)</sup> Out of these two statements we come to realize that colours perform a rudimentary and not a superficial task, and it is through colour that poetry is realized in the painting.

Line is the third element that maintains its poetic value in any work of art, as line has its dynamism and consequently poetic potentials. In fact, poetry is a linear art which Arab artist exploited to the full. Like colour, line derives its meaning through the different relations with time and place. Thus book decoration was not necessarily a functional art

meant to illustrate the text; it sometimes moves beyond that maintaining its own aesthetic and expressive values.

Herbert Read states in his essay *Abstraction and Realism* that; "in the imagination of a poet, nature and idea are conceived in an order of words from which a new world is created, a new reality - a reality which is based on nature yet surpasses nature, such reality is also the aim of the artist."<sup>(8)</sup>

If Al-Wasiti succeeded above all in creating his own conception of a new reality inspired by the literary text, how far did the modern Iraqi artist who inherited the passion for the written word, succeed in creating a harmonious work and establishing his new reality? How far did he succeed in maintaining the aesthetic values and developing, at the same time, the art of book drawing towards modernism?

To borrow again our example from the past, Muslim artists like the Chinese, were, naturally competent painters and calligraphers at the same time. The close relation between the written text and the visual reflections made both the inscribed and the drawn images seem inseparable.

Modern Iraqi artists are rarely calligraphers. They also, in early stages, regarded poetry and literature separate arts and kept rather a distance between them. But during the 1940's, a decade that witnessed the birth of modern art and later the birth of modern poetry, a new awareness in the sisterhood of arts emerged, an awareness that fully developed later in the 1950's. Poets, artists and architects were collaborating together.

In the early 1950's, Jawad Salim, Shakir Hassan and Khalid al-Rahal attempted to make few illustrations for Hussein Mirdan's collection of poems called *The Quiet Ropes Swing*. Similar attempts were made, though they were limited and depended mainly on simple linear forms.

But in 1956, Shakir Hassan, amid his deep involvement in a quest of ancient and Islamic heritage, attempted to re-illustrate *The Arabian Nights* and conceive the images in a modern style where two motives would be realized: a revival of book illustration on the one hand and realisation of a specific character through applying Islamic art through modern technique on the other.

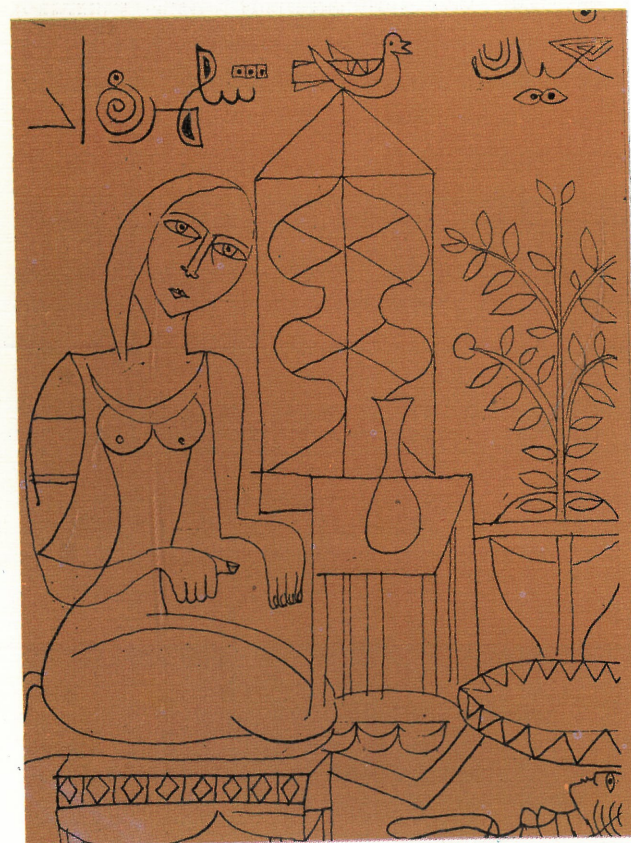
In this fabulous unpublished series of illustration works,<sup>(9)</sup> Shakir Hassan realized a competent parallel of text and form. The freely conceived images of the fanciful episodes accounted in the *Arabian Nights* are reflected in an intricate linear work (ink on paper), were both calligraphy and image interplay to create a sharp sense of magic feeling. Shakir Hassan is not a calligrapher; he is a painter who subjugated Arabic character to match his own stylized figures and abstract motifs. Shakir Hassan chose very few characters, motivated by mainly popular conception, but he revealed a

remarkable sense of imagination as well as a deep understanding of their spirit, a spirit that seems inherent in his own character. These masterpieces may also be regarded as one of the advanced examples of tradition and contemporaneity, that needs a thorough study and revaluation. However, after 30 years Shakir made a similar attempt for a contemporary subject. He introduced a book on war and peace showing a return to those early drawings, his one-man show, 1986.

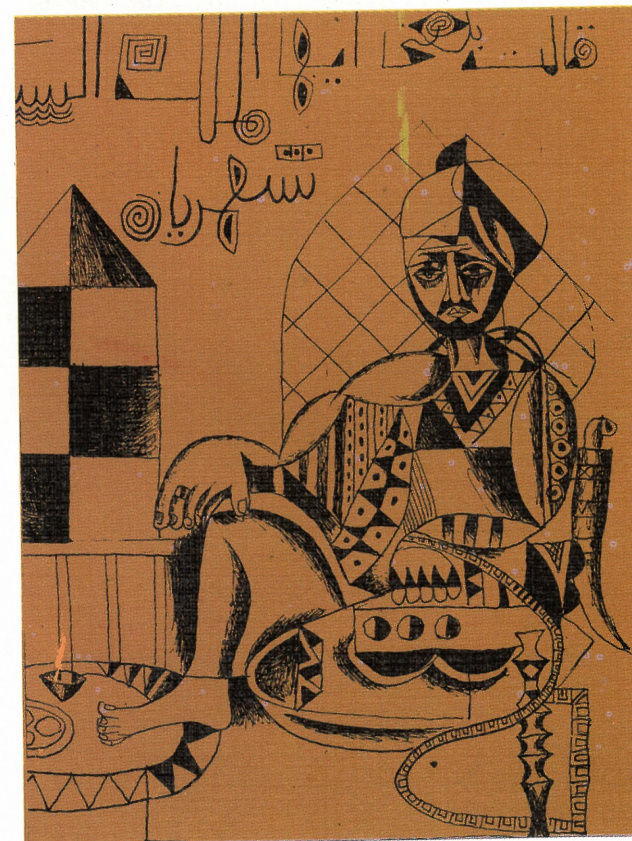
If the 1950's had seen a search for individuality and national identity in art, the 1960's witnessed the yield of those efforts. Such work found its realization in Liberty Monument by Jawad Salim. This work of art was meant to be regarded as a poetic verse written in fourteen individual units from right to left representing a mixture of realistic and symbolic images.<sup>(10)</sup>

The poetic quality within the modern work of art became gradually more intensified during the 1960's. Arabic character as an aesthetic element in the composed image developed to acquire higher aesthetic values. Artists became essentially close to poets in their attempts to create mood and conceive ideas.

It was in 1971 that an original experience of linking art to poetry was introduced. During the 1st al-Marbid poetry festival in Basra, three young artists, Dhia al-Azzawi, Rafa al-Nasiri and Hashim



*Scheherazade and Schehrayar from the Arabian Nights as depicted by Shakir Hassan Al-Saeed*



*A drawing by Shakir Hassan Al-Saeed based on the "Arabian Nights"*





A painting by Al-Wasiti, an artist from the Abbasid era

Samarchi presented three posters containing three poetic texts by Yousif al-Saigh, Fadhil al-Azzawi and Bulland al-Haidari. It was rather a public statement declaring the profound relation between artists and poets in a new age. It also revived a traditional Arab custom where good poems used to be received with acclaim, written in gold and hung on the walls of al-Qa'ba the most sacred Muslim place in Arabia, during the days of Ukadh Market.

In the 1970's artists showed an increasing interest in poetry manifested in book and interior design. Now it has become rather a custom including even magazines and newspapers.

But the major experience in associating art with poetry was presented by Dhia al-Azzawi, who is quite distinguished with his deep involvement in poetry. In addition to the attractive drawings he presented for many of his friends' poets, Dhia used classical and modern poetry to conceive their poetic images and present his own interpretations through individual art works.

In 1972 Dhia al-Azzawi in a one-man-show of oil paintings, exhibited several coloured drawings (gauche and ink on paper) illustrating and conceiving one of the famous romantic episodes in Arabic literature known as 'Waddah al-Yemen and his Beloved.' In a series of beautifully coloured illustrations, Dhia performed certain stylized images where one might easily detect the artist's own personality reflected in the anxiety of the looks and dynamism of the linear contours. Like Shakir Hassan, al-Azzawi is not a calligrapher and therefore the written verses acquired his own linear characteristics.

In the aftermath of Tel al-Za'tar (Lebanon) massacre, Al-Azzawi devoted a collection of prints

(silkscreen) reflecting his own violent reaction to this inhuman act and conceiving at the same time texts by three poets, *Ahmed Al-Za'tar* by Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish, *Left to the Olive Mountain* by Iraqi poet Yusuf al-Saigh *Death Came Laughing to Tel al-Za'tar* by Moroccan poet Tahir Ben Jalloun, Al-Azzawi's very free characteristic conception of the event harmoniously coordinated with the poets' imagery. Though the printed texts juxtaposed the visual image on a separate page, he included certain verses in the composition to emphasize the meaning and reveal its relevance to his own work of art.

Al-Azzawi used colour and line to emphasize the drama of the event, mainly using black as a background to charge the aggressive colours applied, with more power. He, therefore, introduced in these 35 prints, which were published in a book called *The Body Anthem-1976* a series of iconographic works where verses were simply used as an aesthetic form attached to the slaughtered figures.

In 1979, Dhia al-Azzawi attempted a more daring experience when he presented his conception of *Al-Mu'alaqat* the great seven pre-Islamic odes in Arabic literature. The 8 prints (silkscreen) which were presented in one album, is, in fact an extraordinary achievement. The richness of these poems, their versatile images, the particularity of life reflected in early classical Arabic need a thorough study and better knowledge of the environment, custom and nature, as these poems reflect a true image of geographic as well as social life of the Arab Peninsula at that age. The poems differ from each other, as each poet has his own distinctive character and speaks in his own voice. The poets lived urban as well as bedouin life, a matter which seems

reflected in their language, therefore Imru'l Qais differs from Labeed and the delicate poetry of Tarafa is not by any means similar to Antara's or Zubair's.

Al-Azzawi presented a series of compositions depending mainly on intricate lines, using colour to a very limited degree. He drew inspiration from the life of **chivalry**, the agony of man vis-a-vis the cruel nature. He also conceived man's passion for freedom and power. But he failed to note the different characteristics in these poems. In fact, Al-Azzawi drew one main composition in which the seven poems were conceived. Pre-Islamic poets were endowed with an imaginative faculty and a sharp sense of vision. Their description of minute details revealed their visual capacity which often becomes as acute as a competent painter or sculptor. But he seemed to be highly **eclectic** that he only emphasized on what seemed more relevant to his own work and conceptions.

The extracts of the poems on each print seemed deeply integrated with the composition. Written to match al-Azzawi's style, the inscribed text harmoniously served the aesthetics of other details in the composition which in effect an attractive work of art was reflected. In this highly artistic attempt, he succeeded in presenting a subjective view of man's struggle throughout history.

Another interesting experience was attempted by Rafa al-Nassiri, though still unpublished. In a project book, al-Nassiri conceived a collection of poems in which bird assumed the main symbolic figure. The ten drawings (ink on paper) he made represent the bird in different conditions arranged in stages. It begins with the bird's aspirations to freedom but ends up, along a series of oppressions and agonies, to become suspended in the air bleeding from an arrow that wounded its body.

I believe that poetry as a value in an inherent



element in modern Iraqi art. Yet Iraqi artists tend to emphasize this value through conceiving other literary works. Therefore, they have enhanced the art of book and carried it towards modernity though on a limited scale. But through these attempts, Iraqi artists, from Al-Wasiti up to the present while attempting to conceive the literary work, have in fact subjectively reflected their own vision, which though seemingly tied to the written text, eventually represents the artist's own aesthetic values and expressive character.

#### Footnotes

- (1) Painting and the Novel — Geoffrey Meyers— Introduction.
- (2) See Arab Painting by R. Ettinghausen — Thanes and Hudson.
- (3) Al-Wasiti lived in Baghdad around the 12th-13th century A.D. Headed one of the many schools known as the Baghdad School of Art- Al Maqamat are small anecdotes written with a humorous spirit and contain a sharp criticism of society.
- (4) UT Pictura Poesie by Dean Tolle Mace- Encounters-

- Edited by John Dixon Hunt - p.59.
- (5) The Art of Al-Wasiti - Dr Tharwat Ukasha - p.13
- (6) Same source - p.13
- (7) UT Pictura Poesie- by Dean Tolle Mace - p.62.
- (8) Realism and Abstraction in Modern Art - Herbert Read - the Philosophy of Art - p.88
- (9) Shakir Hassan published in Al-Amiloun Fil Naft one of these illustrations in the early sixties.
- (10) Jawad Salem and the Liberty Monument - Jabra I. Jabra.





# abdul - wahab al-bayati

## Poems of Separation and Death

1

An Iraqi moon, brushing its cheek against the trees,  
And knocking on the doors, in vain;  
Before the poor awoke, the princess  
Was on a dove-wing gone  
Without bidding farewell. Whoever sees her  
May please give my regards

2

The moon prince was  
On the fire steed, in the steppes of Spain creeping to the sea,  
Carrying his seven children in his ring as he passed through a haunted garden.  
A maiden lurked for him, and called his youngest born.  
She lured him with a spell of love, she tied his tongue and charmed  
With talisman his eyes.  
And when he was about...  
She was about... was gone.  
And lost was he, the youngest born,  
In the steppes of Spain creeping to the sea.  
And since that time remote, the prince  
Has in the night been calling for his youngest born.  
The steppes have no reply.

3

Should I, whenever passing by the stone — bridge,  
See you, lady of ladies,  
Bathing; the beauty of your charming face



Carried away by waters?  
 Don't ever think that when I sing,  
 I am a happy man.  
 For like a sparrow I would die  
 If, for you, I were not to sing, lady of ladies.

4

Rose bushes they have planted on the grave of an unknown poet.  
 To his side the sparrows would come.  
 An unknown woman would cry all Saturday.  
 And when the dust dries on the grave,  
 A haunted cloud would loom above its silence all day Saturday.

5

He said: you wait for me at the seven gates.  
 And seven years have passed.  
 The forest trees have grown up and  
 The fountain dried.  
 The woman did not keep the promise.  
 The lover, yet,  
 Throughout the seven years  
 Would every evening go and wait beside the seven gates.

## The Gypsy Symphony

1

The gypsy singer at the maiden threw the rose; the maiden, like a feather,  
 turned around herself, and tried to catch the night which on the heights of the  
 "Alhambra" murdered lay, with knives and lilies and with stars his chest was  
 covered. And the gypsy pale, his singing drove the ghosts away; his hand was  
 making in the air the sign: the drowned - the lover - the deceived.  
 The maiden, like a feather, flew behind his troubled, supplicating hand.  
 "Alhambra" was, as usual, drowned in silence.  
 And the gypsy shouted: "wake up! columns, altars, arches, cubes of light into a  
 poem of future-prophecy-departure.  
 Shouted: Wake up! myth, you tribe - the maiden threw her hand to his and  
 kissed it,  
 then they danced together and became a tongue of flame.

The rose then kindled in her hair.  
 The gypsy shouted: Burn, you little beauty, burn!  
 Her head then bent and met the eyes and lips, the time of death is this, upon  
 the pillow of the spring.  
 His head then bent; she held it while he cried, and drove the ghosts with song  
 arising from the depth of myth- of tribe. "Alhambra" was, as usual, drowned  
 in silence, and on its gates the dawn was drawing trees and larks of parting  
 night.  
 Then met the eyes and lips.  
 The gypsy, frightened, shouted: Halt you feather in the orbit of this  
 catastrophe-game.  
 The maiden turned two rounds  
 And stopped  
 To try and catch the night which on the heights of the "Alhambra" murdered  
 lay,  
 with knives and lilies and with stars his chest was covered.





The singer's griefs migration halted.  
 The bird has in the ambush fallen.  
 The gypsy carts tonight have passed through muds of this besieged and  
 haunted road.  
 With handkerchief, the gypsy wiped the knife and crossed the street; was in the  
 cafe hustled with the ghosts, afraid, was singing to himself. The fortune-teller  
 to him said that other wondrous towns beyond the river lie, and there the sun  
 does not set in the night, and there is not deceived the lover - drowned amidst  
 the river, nor does there depart the feather - maiden.  
 Come near, he shouted, I have seen your eyes in journeys of the stars - the  
 wind.  
 And my ancestors on the sun gate,  
 And the secret graves - or caves your face did paint, your face which in the  
 light is drowned.  
 And, when the spring returned, would celebrate the soul's return to nature  
 dead.  
 The ghosts are gone! The cafe's gone!  
 The gypsy kneeling, crying and  
 His hand in hers in silence dumb.  
 The fortune-teller rose and twice went round  
 And stopped  
 To try and catch the night which on the heights of the "Alhambra" murdered  
 lay, with knives and lilies and with stars his chest was covered.

Translated by Dr. A.W. Lu'lu'a

Abdul Wahab al-Bayati was born in Baghdad in 1926 and graduated from the Teacher  
 Training College in 1950. His first poetry anthology, *Angels and Devils* was published in  
 1950. Most of his works have been translated into many foreign languages.

His works include:

*Smashed Pitchers* (1954), *Glory to Children and Olive* (1956), *Poems in Exile* (1957),  
*Twenty Poems from Berlin* (1959), *Trial in Naysabour* (a play) 1963, *Journey of Poverty*  
*and Revolution* (1969), *Writing on Clay* (1970), *Shiraz's Moon* (1975).



abdul - razaq

abdul - wahid

## The Fire Fountain

With lead my heart is laden.  
 You, hellish fount, your flow has cleft my throat;  
 To blades has turned in me, your spring, a thousand blades,  
 It has all quenched except the groan of the stung,  
 Licking his wound and crying,  
 Drinking all water in the world, never to cool off.

With lead my heart is laden  
 A thousand cups were on your lips except the water,  
 You water-well; I bored the earth to reach its bottom  
 And water,  
 To follow its promise of water,  
 I chew its sand,  
 And down I fall,  
 And down its bottom falls, and water

## Two languages

When I speak Arabic,  
 He harks, turning towards my voice,  
 And then he aims...  
 I call you to peace,  
 to the dream,



to...  
 His bullet is lodged in my mouth,  
 My language is drowned in my blood.  
 When he speaks Persian,  
     he curses,  
     He damns,  
 He draws a thousand roads to his death:  
 My bullet is lodged in his heart  
 He falls...  
 I hear him behind his bunker  
 Swearing at me, while biting the dust.  
 Our guns speak one language,  
 But we speak two.

## A Fugitive from the Museum

With the dignity of five thousand sand years his feet budged,  
 On the museum staircase,  
 He turned back stunned,  
 Feeling his eyes,  
 His hands,  
 His voice,  
 Recovering their familiarity.  
 The ambiguity of things around him lessened a bit.  
 Clenched with fear,  
 He remembered his ears,  
 His breath,  
 His heart, that sound.  
 Disturbed, he realized he was now getting out of his marble silence,  
 To the din of flesh and blood.  
 Losing his silence,  
 He checked what was around him.  
 Fearing everything,  
 He tried to crouch behind its glass,  
 To freeze for five thousand years  
 Congealed, piercing the rocky slate.  
 Five  
 Thousand  
 Years...  
 He tottered,  
 He leaned,  
 And then collapsed nearby its glass.

He is now creeping out of fifty centuries.  
 He crawled with gaping eyes to the slate.  
 There is his name,  
 His town.  
 He now remembers:  
 Children,  
 Home,  
 All look so clear to him..  
 His past was swollen on the slate.  
 He shivered with horror.  
 Five  
 Thou-  
 sand  
 Years.  
 He felt his limbs  
 And was astounded by their vigour  
 They did not have the rock resilience  
 Its poverty,  
 Its secrecy,





Or its prodigious silence.  
 They have become a splintering wind  
 Or seas, with bottom waves ablaze.  
 Who would to his jar return the giant, now bulging in his depths!  
 His eyes then pierced through the glass.  
 He was astounded that five thousand years behind the glass  
 His eyes could pierce  
 And nothing could stop his look to pass,  
 To tear it.  
 It was a shield then  
 Pierced by the looks these five thousand years.  
 They sprouted, these five thousand years.  
 They dug it searching for themselves.  
 It was a shield for five thousand years,  
 Corroded by excess of eyes looking at it, till they  
 Used up their fear.  
 A worm attacked its marble  
 And every eye sent to its nakedness a thousand searching eyes.  
 Five thousand years  
 And splintered flesh and blood.  
 His depths rebelled  
 And burned its wrath.  
 It was an armour then.  
 He went towards its glass  
 He would leave nothing  
 Nor any trace of him on it.  
 And he recalled his things:  
 The nakedness  
 And death  
 He shouldered his eternal nakedness,  
 And put his death under his arm  
 He paced with the dignity of five thousand sand years.  
 And poured into the street.  
 All lamp-posts woke up,  
 All window-hinges turned,  
 And into eyes they turned,  
 Pacing.

*Poems 1 and 3 translated by Dr. A.W. Lu'lu'a*  
*Poem 2 translated by Dr. Salman Al-Wasiti*

Abdul Razaq Abdul Wahid was born in Baghdad in 1930 and graduated from the Teacher Training College in 1952. At present he works as a cultural advisor at the Ministry of Information and Culture.

His works include *The Devil's Curse* (1950), *The Great Chant* (1959), *Poems Which Were Forbidden* (1963), *Tent on the Fringes of the Forty* (1970), *Al-Hur al-Riahi* (a play) 1982, *The Harbinger* (1985), *Salute to the Water of Soil* (1986).

He has also written a number of poems for children including *River and Orchard* (1977), *Chanting Cloud* (1983), *Two Cases Under Rain* (1986).

# Yousif al-Sayigh

## Reincarnation

I watch an Iraqi tank  
 Advancing towards the enemy...  
 I follow it  
 While it fires its guns,  
 I shout:  
 Oh God,  
 I'm a poet  
 It's a dank  
 What a difference...  
 Give me a sign!  
 Promptly  
 I feel as if a hand has blessed me  
 Here I am  
 Reincarnated into a body of steel,  
 And there is the soul  
 Making me a track and chains  
 Here is the turret  
 and I  
 Advance towards the enemy  
 And fire my guns.





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## The Slain Date-palm

---

It is a small house,  
Seen from the river-side  
By those who go to Fao  
A house...two southerly windows  
And a large door...  
Ten steps away there stands  
A date-palm, still in her adolescence,  
With wide eyes and silken hair...

\* \* \* \*

Late at night  
The Persians attacked...  
Two hours elapsed and the sun rose  
And now the house is seen  
Burning by those who go to Fao  
Two shattered windows  
And a door without a bolt  
And a silken lock of hair  
Hanging on the fence.

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## Memoirs of a Very Ordinary Hero

---

To a secret supper I invite,  
With Easter wine and my water  
I wash the feet of my beloved,  
And say farewell:  
Tonight one of you will hand me over to death.  
A friend who kills me... is better.  
A dagger held by the beloved is pardon.  
As for you,  
You shall deny me before the cock crows.  
Denial kills me.  
And I pardon.  
So ask those who pardoned.

They vowed to Holy Abbas, but did not kneel;  
By the Holy Quran,  
And the promise,  
And a bouquet of flowers,  
Every beloved I follow  
Deludes me by the first experience;  
And I die at his hand-how simple is my heart-  
And I believe my death..  
O my killer!

Give me the like of those I love.  
Suggest me a brother to the one they shamed  
me with.

Change the heart,  
-At the hour of love-  
And the lips.

Draw a moon for two  
My love and I in the midst of the way.  
Draw ten points for doubting,  
And for checking.

The heart hair grew up, long.  
He came to comb it with his fingers  
And nearly caused my death.

But:

At that moment...between my blood and salvation  
When you approach, my wife

And come to my unrest  
Uncovered with dishevelled hair  
Desire is in my body growing,  
Growing,

And at that moment,  
A man would come into the hall and wake me,

To shame me: That I played the martyr,  
What do you see?  
Despised is the one who returned from his death;  
A groom suffering impotence at the bride's bed,  
We lurked for him,  
Behind the door of his martyrdom,  
And waited for moaning virginity,  
Betting on his suffering:  
Success and failure,  
Watching in his weakness our eternal fear...  
Misunderstanding is the slayer  
And the sea had its violent fits...  
Fish feeding on fish:  
On what the fisherman shall feed?  
And I am a man accused of a cold palm



And of cursed fear on the body of the first experience,  
And of walking in sleep to an unknown aim  
And of sending myself

Ten letters  
To be sure of my address;  
The age's address is someone killed  
Not caring for names,  
Inattentive, in his sincerity about the habits of his  
heroism,  
Does not care that his name is not mentioned among  
martyrs.

Therefore I was ashamed,  
I covered my face before you my woman.  
I asked how shall I look tomorrow...if I am carried to you killed?  
I closed my eyes  
And gaped my mouth,

I saw me killed before a mirror,  
Became a martyr... nothing nicer than me.  
On the stage, before the close of scene,  
The world hires me to kill.  
Every beloved I follow  
Demands death,  
And gives me a number:  
Marking, near my name, and day,  
And I bought two tickets for my night of love  
And we were two:  
Myself and the killer  
In the midst of the way.  
So whereto shall you emigrate, you exiled from his death?  
-I prepared suitcases for migration,  
And ironed my shirt for emigration.

The Arab unrest was chasing me  
In squares full of beggars.  
I went round streets carrying names of killed men,  
I saw the squares turned statues, covered with flowers  
So jealousy scratched my heart,  
I cried: where then is my place?  
Shall I stand up on my grave-stone?  
Shall I turn into a statue,  
And die, so no one makes fun of me?  
From fire-line to fire-line there is a call.  
Red milk is for the dead,  
The fruit of failure for the living.  
Don't you see the blood  
Escaping from below your feet  
To clog the wheels of armoured cars

And draw of that  
The maps of future failure?  
From a killed man  
To brave men:

Hail!

All the crosses have arrived  
And let us gather all the heroes hindered against their will,  
Those failures in love,  
In jealousy,  
Intentional death  
And misunderstanding.

Let us gather them, and play all forbidden roles  
In the name of the law.

The prison clock of the Arab homeland has announced  
The rites of martyr's burial.

Come, let's carry him, out of worry

As apology.

Shame on civilization

Where the martyr

Commits a suicide.

*Poems 1 and 2 translated by Dr. Salman Al-Wasiti*

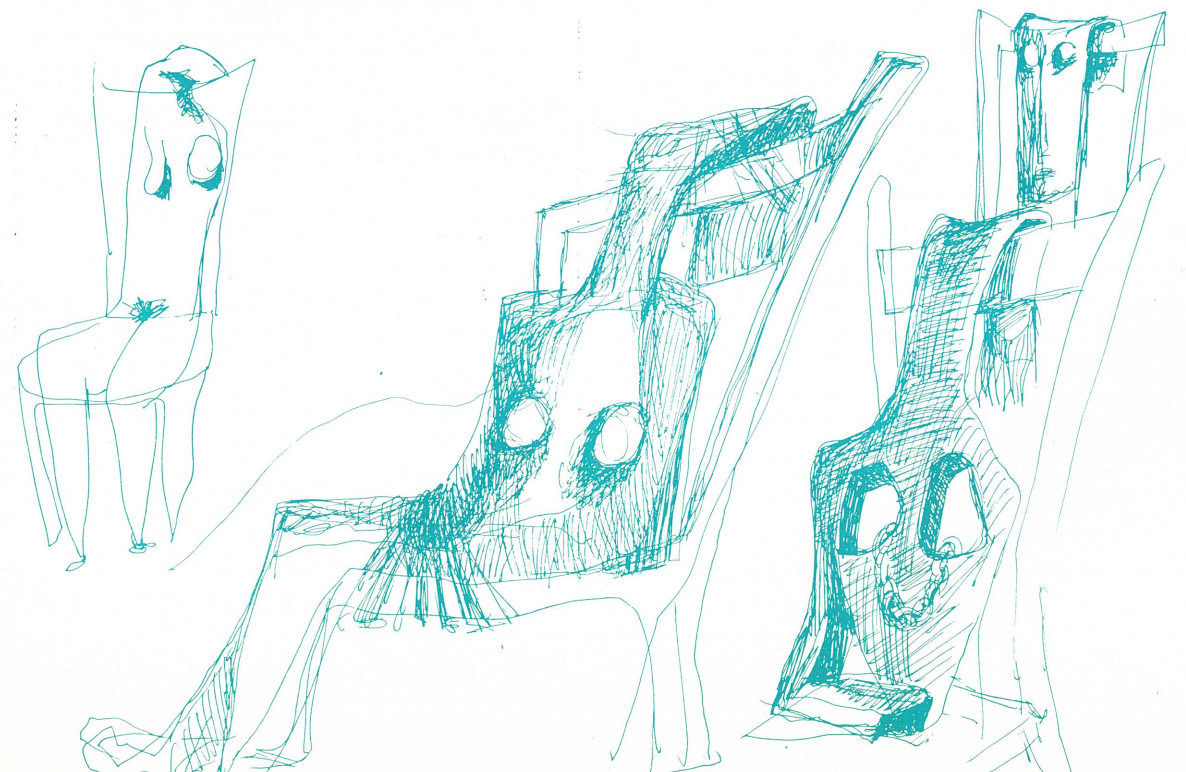
*Poem 3 translated by Dr. A.W. Lu'lua'a*

#### Yousif al-Sayigh

Born in Mosul 1933. Graduate of the Higher Institute of Education 1955. M.A. , University of Baghdad. Member of Artists' Society in Iraq. Member of Iraqi Writers Union. Director General of Cinema and Theatre Authority at the Ministry of Information and Culture.

#### Works:

*Poems unfit for publication* (1957), *Confession of Malek Ibn al-Deeb* (1971), *The Game* (a novel) (1970), *The Distance* (a novel) (1973), *Free Verse in Iraq* (University Thesis) (1976), *Confessions - an anthology of poetry* (1977), *Lady of the Four Apples - Anthology* (1975), *The Teacher* (1986).





# abdul-khalig al-rikabi

## The Cavalier

(1)

At dawn, when sleep is usually most desired, I used to wake up at the voice of my grandfather:

— Hey! You cave-dwellers! Enough sleep! Your bed will be worn out by your long sleep!

That was his favourite sentence which he used to shout from behind the door whenever he came on a visit. Briskly, which was not my habit, I used to pull out of bed, stepping out with barefeet, avoiding what may happen to be on my way, which I could not see because of the darkness, which had not lifted by then, closely listening to the squeaking door which my mother threw open. Along that oblong, lit by the gray dawn, I saw my grandfather tying his horse near the threshold, loosening the saddle belt, hanging around its neck the mohair barley-sack.

Bashfully, so strange from an old man, his looks flickered as he quietly stole into the house, smiling, answering my mother's queries about his health and affairs, gradually casting off his loads. He would place his cudgel behind the door and hang his cloak on a nail in the wall. Then, coming near the sitting area covered with mats, he would take off his slippers of decked

wool-and-silk, place his woolen striped saddle-bag by the fireplace dug into the ground, tipping off his dotted headkerchief with jolt of his head, not noticing me as I was taking shelter in a dark corner, watching him with cunning eyes, suppressing a giggle, shaking my little body, which would soon burst and let me out, so I would rush to him with light steps and surprise him while bending, throwing my little arms round his neck, inhaling the scent of the open fields coming out of his sturdy build. In turn, my grandfather would put his lengthy arms round my body, straightening up to have his whole head covered with his white cap which I almost tipped off in my awkward rush towards him, striking my face with his warm breath laden with tobacco smell.

—Hey, you old boy? Do you still wet your bed at night?

That was his second sentence which he could not help repeating. He would run his fingers along the down spreading on my cheeks which was his reason for calling me an old boy.

To the right of the fireplace, amid a cloud of dust raised by the mattress, which my mother dropped on the mat, my grand-

father would settle down and put me on his knees. Then he would forget me completely, talking infinitely about the village, his field and horses, to my mother who was busy preparing breakfast. I would busy myself looking at his face closely, scrutinizing, with some surprise, his eyes so hidden under his bushy eyebrows, his thin beard grown gray, the wrinkles and folds across his dark brown face. I would watch him so closely while he was busy with a number of actions: now he is chewing his bread, now sipping his tea, now talking incessantly, now stuffing his pipe with tobacco and sticking it in the corner of his mouth to send up puffs of smoke encouraging my cunning, and I would start coughing vehemently to attract his attention to me. When I succeed in that I would fall in a real fit of coughing which would make my grandfather tap on my back awkwardly and shout:

—Hey, Hey! You have really become an old boy.

No sooner could I control my coughing, with my eyes filling with tears, than I would be surprised with his fingers running through my hair, shaking my head vehemently as if planning to break my neck, caressing me in that awkward manner which was the only thing I hated in him.

At that moment my father would be awake, starting to shuffle along with faltering steps, still very drowsy, welcoming his father and asking about his health. My grandfather would repeat his third favourite sentence.

— Health comes from God, you unfaithful son!

My father would smile quietly and sit beside him, jokingly claiming that his leaving the village and settling in the city was no breach of faith on his part. He had come to the town out of necessity. There, work is plentiful, life is easier, and children need to go to school. My grandfather would go along with that joking and insist on reprimanding.

— It's enough that you have run away from the village and left the old men like

myself to defend you against enemies.

Then he would stop joking and assume a serious tone, talking about new infiltrations from behind the borders, which resulted in loss of some cattle and some fields burned. That was not so exciting, since he had related similar incidents in the past. What was new in the matter was his insistence that there were rumours among the farmers telling of dubious preparations in the mountain overlooking the villages of the area. Then he would resume with a serious tone:

—One gun placed on the mountain would put an end to us all!

—Grandpa, take me to the mountain!

I am surprised by my thin voice coming out without my control, despite the contradiction between my funny request and that serious situation. Every time my grandfather visited us he used to tell me of that wonderful mountain some tales that would charge my imagination and make me wander with closed eyes through its rugged passes impossible to cross, chasing its wild animals and birds!

—The mountain is larger than you, old boy. But, anyhow I brought you something from it!

He answered me, resuming his earlier light tone, pulling the saddle-bag nearby. Out of one pocket he took out some cheese blocks, a hide of fresh yogurt and the game gathered from the last hunting expedition he undertook: pheasants, partridges and grouses. Out of the other pocket of the saddle-bag he snatched out a swollen bag and threw it on my lap in that awkward manner of his. When I suspected something moving inside the bag I flung it away, feeling the down on my cheeks bristling with terror. I was more terrified when I saw the bag spasmodically shaking on the floor, emitting hushed squeaks which made my grandfather look utterly mad when he threw back his head choking with laughter, until I could see his rosy throat with that suspending growth of skin.

— You will always remain that boy who is scared by a buzzing fly. Come on, open the



bag yourself to see my gift to you. Otherwise I won't be your grandpa anymore!

Then he would lift me off his knees to strike me on the back. With nervous steps, I would approach the bag with my heart thumping vehemently. No sooner did I open the bag that I would be startled with the sight of a bird of the size of a chicken, flitting under my nose to move about the living area with two yellowish orange legs, looking for a refuge. Before that bluish gray coat of feathers, tinged with a hazel shade stripped with crimson I could not help suffocating with astonishment. My grandfather would comment,

— You see? It's nothing but a baby Kudairi bird. If you take care of it, it will grow up to have a large size.

Extremely serious, my grandfather would talk long about that scary bird which dwells in that mountain rising near the borders; a bird almost impossible to catch, as it is extremely careful to avoid men, and never leaves his mountain except to come down to the plain, forced by the winter snows.

That would be the happiest day of my life. You would see me chasing my grandfather with questions about the way to raise that Kudairi bird. What sort of seeds should I feed it? Does it drink water like chicken, one drop after the other, or does it quaff it like pigeon? Could it be a prey to the neighbours' cat? Will it fly away when its wings grow? Numerous questions which my grandfather never tired to answer, always bursting in laughter and calling me the old boy.

At dawn, the following day, I would jump out of bed, terrified by my grandfather's voice who was pulling at my leg. For a moment I would think that what I had feared had actually happened, and that the neighbours' cat had eaten up my Kudairi bird. But I would be surprised that the matter was not more than that my grandfather wanted to burst a good-bye kiss near my ear.

(2)

So, when I woke up once on one of his visits, as he was pulling me by the leg, I gave out my cheek to him spontaneously, to receive that unwanted good-bye kiss and resume my sleep. But he pinched my cheek and shouted:

— Come on you old boy! You are too old for kisses! It's time for you to come up with me to visit the village which your father had left behind.

Immediately, I was fully awake. Take me to the village! Is that believable? I scrutinized my mother's face, beggingly, and she nodded approval. Without any hesitation, I kicked away my quilt and flitted ahead of my grandfather, snatching on my way the empty saddle-bag and his cloak hanging on the nail, while his jovial voice followed, addressing my father:

— Do you see him, you unfaithful son? He's better than you. In any case he knows how to flatter me.

He fixed the reins of that mare, and the saddle to her back, spreading on it the bag and cloak. Then he pushed his foot in the stirrup. Surprisingly swift, he was on horseback looking at me from that lofty point, holding the rein with his left hand and snapping to me with his right, calling me with a constant smile:

— Come on, show me how clever you are in horse-riding!

I almost shouted, "what has come over you grandpa? I have never seen a mare except from a distance which would keep me safe from her mortal kicks. How should I ride her then?" But I was afraid he would change his mind about taking me with him. Then he did not give me a chance. He bent towards me until his head almost touched his knee. He held me by the arm, asking me to find a way to lift myself up. So I hurried to support my left foot on his right foot so fixed in the stirrup. But he chided,

— Not so, not so! Then you would see yourself riding the horse the other way round.

I supported my other foot on his own. Then, holding my breath I started climbing, feeling the blood about to burst out of my face. The moment I put my leg across the horseback I found myself crumbled in my grandfather's lap with his arms round me. Then I uttered a sigh of relief. Then my grandfather stroke the mare on the neck, gently with the rein, and her hoofs started slowly and nobly cracking on the rocks of the road. From behind came my mother's voice asking me to be careful. But my grandfather snubbed her, saying she would certainly spoil me and not give me a chance to become a man one day.

We hardly left the town behind, going through the paths of the woods, when my grandfather stirred the mare on both sides. With a marvellous speed, her lively movement to the cadence of the four hoofs turned into a fast gallop permeated with two successive beats of the hoofs. My grandfather repeated stirring the mare would jump swimming in the air and the echo of her hoofs could be clearly heard through the trees thickening around us. I gave a startled choke, feeling I would certainly fall off. My grandfather burst in laughter at that time, and I hated him.

— Hold on firm, or you will never become a cavalier.

But how could I keep firm now that the mare has tipped down her head as if to stab the wind, leaving her rich mane blowing before my eyes filling with tears, and the tips of the branches swimming in every direction, the blue sky flitting over our heads, making one dizzy! My grandfather resumed his shouting, holding me tight with his arms,

— Don't be afraid. It is a genuine Arab mare, of the type of "Kaheela Al-Ajooz". Her gallop is steady and she will not let her rider down, ever!

At last the woods opened before us to show corn-fields extending as far as the eye can see. Again I choked, but this time at the wonder before my eyes. Far away, at the tip of horizon, under a gray cloud whose

neither tip was tinged with the golden glow of the not yet risen sun, there was the mountain, going up in turquoise splendour, tipped with a touch of rose.

— Do you remember? That is the mountain you asked me to take you to a few years ago.

But I thought to myself that it could not be as my grandfather had described; a wild hideout where enemies set up their destructive weapons. To me, the mountain looked so beautiful as to send tears into the eyes. As if my grandfather had read my thoughts, he shouted:

— Don't be taken in. It looks beautiful from far. But if you come closer you'll see nothing but rugged upright passes across huge rocks approached by nothing alive except wild goats, Kudairi birds, vultures and enemy guns — and nothing else!

At the village I was astonished to see my grandfather's house with its large courtyard decked with trees, with its numerous rooms of low ceilings. Some of the rooms had their doors mounted with heads of wild goats stuffed complete with their upturned horns. There were animals in every direction, chickens and birds everywhere. That house enchanted me so that I forgot the mountain completely.

(3)

But the mountain haunted my imagination whenever my grandfather took me to it on horseback, in my intermittent visits to the village, and whenever the woods opened to its violet volume at the tip of the horizon. One day I thought my grandfather had decided to realise that dream which was always haunting me, and that he would take me to the mountain. Once at daybreak — after a whole day of wandering about the rooms of that wonderful house — I was startled from sleep when my grandfather started pulling me by the leg. He led me by the hand, while I was stumbling and still drowsy, only to spill cold water on my face and make me shudder. All he did was to utter a quiet laugh and beckon me to follow him. And follow him I did, spellbound, as





he was heading to the stable near his house, where you could always find three or four horses, which he procured while they were still little foals, to raise and tend them, then to sell them at a profitable price. My nostrils became laden with the sharp smell of dung. The horses turned their heads towards us, clacking with their upright ears. The blonde mare which my grandfather used to ride hit the ground with its hoof, and neighed as if to welcome us. For a long while my grandfather seemed to forget me, moving about among his horses, stroking their manes and quivering foreheads, patting curiously gently on their faces and warm nostrils, blabbing to them incomprehensible words. I was annoyed to be only standing there, doing nothing but staring stupidly around. I hastened to push a copper tass into a bag leaning on through wall, containing some crushed barley. My grandfather had noticed my move and gave me a sarcastic look:

— Do you want to feed them old boy?

I nodded approval.

— If you mean to help me then hand me the saddle.

I brought him the saddle which he began to tie to the back of his horse.

— Don't forget that horses have to drink before they are fed.

He said that as if he were giving a lesson, coupled with a long talk about breeding horses, concluding:

—...horses are like human beings. There are those of genuinely good breed that will not let down their owner. There are those of a base origin that would kick you in the eye the moment you are not looking. I have never, in my whole life, kept anything but genuinely good horses... I have papers to prove that... This black steed which looks like a piece of the night is "Saglawi". That light gray mare, tattooed on the forehead is of the "Humadi Al-Fahad" pedigree. That white horse, with black tail, forelock and mane— a rarity among horses — has a lineage connected with "Hadba Nazhi". That bay one, with legs of white anklets has

the lineage of "Shwaima Sayah"...

We left the stable riding the mare, pulling the four other horses by the reins. My grandfather never stopped talking:

— I have bred most of the rare types except two, which I have not laid hand on yet. These are "Ubaya Al-Sharak" and "Mu'annage Hadraj".

His condescension to uncover the secrets of the work he held so dear to me — as if I were his equal — and reciting the mysterious pedigrees of his horses to my hearing had surprised me a little, nay filled me with pride. What really astounded me was that we were heading to the mountain itself. We had left the village with the mountain before us, rising high with its turquoise volume, tapped with crimson by the morning sun. Though we had crossed a good distance towards that mountain, yet it remained so far away as though we were not an inch nearer. I completely lost patience and could not help bursting with a question:

— Grandpa...Where are we going?

As it was his habit, whenever faced by a silly question, he would not condescend to answer. We went deep into sandy land, scattered with gray tamarisk bushes and willow woods, and the mare made a stop near the grand valley. This is a valley whose course was deepened by the seasonal torrents, beginning at the lower reaches of the mountain, passing across fields, villages, and the city too. Under the blue sky, there were twinkling water expansions, scattered in the wide bed of that valley, covered with sand and pebbles, bordered with bushes and reeds, with the dusty leaves tinted with the red sediment of the winter torrents which fill the far edges with turbid and turgid waters, receding a few days later, leaving layers of sediment covering the plants tilted in the direction of the currents.

The mare hesitated by the very steep edge. Behind her the horses crowded in place, fluttering upright ears, staring with awe into that spacious depression. For the first time I saw my grandfather being cruel to his mare, spurring her sharply, shouting



to her as the edges to that valley echoed his voice. The mare lowered its head between her forelegs to descend very cautiously. After a short distance, she went down with full weight, pulling the other horses behind her with their clattering hoofs raising a cascade of pebbles and sand. I was about to lose my consciousness with fear as I was sure I would at any moment slip over the mare's neck and break my own I tried to keep my balance by leaning backwards until I stuck completely to my grandfather. We passed that ordeal safely. Then the water began splashing around the horses' legs as my grandfather let them quench their thirst while he was whistling to them. They quaffed deep and long at every now and then suddenly one of them would lift a head, curiously staring at various parts of the valley, uneasily moving short bristling ears, hunting for mysterious voices which do not reach our human ears.

— Now, come on, jump!

At that moment I was sure my grandfather had gone completely mad. Otherwise, why the jump? But he gave me no chance and resorted to his awkward methods. He pushed me roughly and I held on to the stripes of the saddle as my whole body was slipping and my foot hopelessly looking for some support. Then, splash! and I was in the midst of the water, which put me into a fit of coughing. He did not care, but surprised me with a brush which almost cut me in the head. He came down from his mare, patting her on the buttocks, so she went out of the water. Without exchanging a word with me he took hold of one of the horses and busied himself by pouring water over its body and rubbing it with a brush I know not where he got hold of. I was forced to do likewise, making terrible oaths in my secret that if I ever returned safely to the town I would never accompany him to the village.

We washed the horses which took their way one by one out of the water, their shining, smooth bodies steaming as they shook off the remaining drops violently.

Then I followed them, avoiding to look at my grandfather who took one horse by the rein, pulling out from a tamarisk bush a young branch and went wafting it in the air, and whoop... the horse began moving round him on the sandy land, turning faster round and round as my grandfather was whipping the air more and more. Then came a moment when it was impossible for me to tell them apart in the midst of that fast movement which made me dizzy in the head.

Finally, when my grandfather finished exercising his horses he had to prove his utter madness as he surprised me by saying:

— Listen you old boy! What would you say if I gave you the reins of one of the horses, put you on its bare back, gave it a stroke on its buttocks, so you'd find for yourself the way to the mountain you've given me such headache by asking about it?

I gave no answer. In fact I had no power to utter a word at the time. I realized without any doubt what a confounded madman was that grandfather of mine. The only thing I still remember is that I made a second oath to myself that, if God brought me out safe I would never accompany him on a visit to the village, even if he gave me Solomon's mines.

(4)

— Hey, you cave-dwellers! Enough sleep! Your bed will be worn out by your long sleep! I woke up to my grandfather's voice who, no sooner caught sight of me than he called out:

— This time you'll stay a few days with me in the village.

Then he began throwing off his loads to take his place before the stove rich with red brands.

— You are coming with me on a trip!

A trip? In such weather? And I cast a dazed look at his mare seen through the open door, letting down her ears with surrender to the soft drizzle coming down after three long days of rain. I could not help saying to myself, sarcastically, "What a

suitable weather for a trip!" Yet, I nodded approval, forgetting my old oath not to go with him on a visit to the village even if he gave me Solomon's mines!

When we left the house on the morrow, my grandfather stuck me behind him. The day was clear, with nothing left of the stormy rains except some wet patches and pools of stagnant water. As soon as we were in the midst of the woods, I held my grandfather by the waist and was ahead of him in spurring the mare in the sides and off she went, swiftly swimming in the gathering fog. Our laughter was reverberating all around us, and I felt the cool wind slashing my face until I could not feel my nose.

We did not stop at the village except a short while for my grandfather to fill his tobacco-pouch and pocket his pistol. Once more it seemed to me that our destination was none but the mountain which had completely disappeared in the clouds of fog. My grandfather did not let me in on the secret of that sudden journey until I began to hear the thunder of a hushed torrent overflowing in the vale a day earlier.

— Listen you old boy... There is a unique deal of some horses including two foals of the two rare types I told you about.

The wet tamarisk bushes opened to the turbulent and muddy waters under a vast expanse of fog. He said in a louder voice:

— And there is nothing between us and that deal except that water!

He made a despising gesture towards that turbulent current as if it were a brook which can be crossed by one leap. After a single moment of hesitation I tightened my grip round my grandfather's waist, quite convinced that he had infected me with his foolhardiness.

— Keep looking at my back.

He shouted that, spurring the mare gently. Despite my belief that what we were about to do was sheer madness, the matter was no longer in my hand. The mare had surrendered to the devastating current which was going in turbulent whirlpools round her legs, steadily going higher and

higher. She suddenly stumbled and we were almost thrown off her back. But soon she regained balance and looked as if going against the current. I looked with real awe at the foaming turbid waters which began to slash my bare legs, feeling heavy in the chest.

— Grandpa... Let's go back. I can bear it no longer!

— Didn't I tell you to keep looking at my back? You are only dizzy. Close your eyes tightly!

He said that with a strong voice, trying to overpower the roaring current which surrounded our mare so lost amidst at the wild waves, I closed my eyes, but felt more dizzy, so I gnashed my teeth at the height of my anger at my weakness. Then I centred my eyes on my grandfather's back imbibing the air with mouth and nostrils. The waters were going up my thighs incessantly. Once more the mare stumbled. I felt her legs coming off the bottom hidden deep down. Then the current pushed her off with curious ease, so I closed my eyes, waiting for the inevitable end. I did not reopen my eyes expect when the mare neighed as she could touch the bottom one more. I could not believe my eyes when I saw the waters pulling back until they became so shallow, splashing under the mare's hoofs which now began to blow her nostrils with pride while making her way to the dry land.

I hastened to come down as my teeth were tight in my mouth, not because of the cold as by the strange ecstasy which overwhelmed me as I stood looking across the foaming waters to the tamarisk bushes rising on the other bank of the valley, as if I had left there my childhood, forever.

(5)

Unlike his habit, my grandfather came to us at suppertime.

— Come on, hurry up! They have beaten us by two long hours!

He shouted that and curbed his mare quivering under him. I did not fail to notice



that he was shouldering his rifle. Then I hurried to don my headkerchief and throw a belt round my waist which I burdened with my large dagger. Then I leaped behind my grandfather and off went the mare. I did not waste time to ask him for explanation or who were the ones who had beaten us. My long acquaintance with him taught me how to deal with that old man.

— They must be on the other side of the borders. Their infiltrations and theft have increased lately.

As I expected, he eventually explained the matter to me as we were going through the dark woods so full of wailing jackals and squeaking grasshoppers.

— I had an appointment with someone who desired to buy those two steeds which were mere foals when I bought them on that trip when you were with me. When I came home I found the stable empty.

The clapping of the hoofs was noisily echoing around us as the mare was making her way in the heart of darkness with wonderful speed.

— We'll chase them by the shortest cuts to catch them before they cross the borders. Otherwise it will be impossible if they take to the mountain paths.

His last words made him more excited, so he spurred the mare violently and she soon brought us to the big valley, then we kept silent along the left bank. Suddenly my grandfather curbed the mare and almost broke her neck. Then he stuck his palm behind his ear.

— Do you hear?

I could not hear a thing except the wind whistling through the dark tamarisk bushes.

— Didn't I tell you they are from the other side of the borders? Here they are before us, going through the valley on their way to the mountain. Listen. You keep to this bank and I'll keep to the other. When you hear a shot make as much noise as you can and push all the stones and pebbles you can to the bottom of the valley.

Then I climbed down the saddle, and my grandfather took the mare down the path. I

took my way to the mountain, under a sky shining with thousands of stars. A little later, I heard some hushed voices coming up to my left from the bottom of the valley. At the same moment a shot went off and down I went to the ground covered with pebbles all around me, pushing torrents of those pebbles down the valley and causing an echoing roar. It sounded as if a whole army was about to move. A few startled voices were heard, followed by a gallop. Then all was silent.

I descended to the bottom of the valley and was guided to my grandfather by the glow on his pipe.

— Well, what news grandpa?

Naturally, he did not answer me, but pointed with his pipe to a point where I could discern, amidst a pool decked with stars, those two steeds drinking deeply. Near them there was an ugly mule which the thieves must have left behind.

On the way back, my grandfather silently handed me the reins of one of the two steeds, which I mounted with no hesitation.

(6)

When it was decided that I should be the guide to the group I thought I had to pass by my grandfather's village, then take them to the big valley to avoid enemy artillery, which had not stopped shelling for days. Thus I could catch up with the unit which had gone ahead of us to the mountain by taking the short cuts and the safest ones. When I passed by the oblique door of my grandfather's house I curbed my horse and called out:

— Hey, you cave-dwellers, do you still sleep early like chicken?!

Preceded by his stick knocking on the floor, my grandfather opened the door, lifting his head and narrowing his eyes under the glare of reddening twilight. He carefully scrutinized my spotted khaki clothes before he burst out with his wonted laugh, which he had not changed through the years.

— Lord, you've grown up! You've really grown up old boy. But to my eyes you're still that boy I've brought up on my own hands.

— Not exactly on your hands, grandpa. You've brought me up on the backs of your horses.

Amidst the surprise of my fellow soldiers who stood near their mules laden with ammunition, we kept laughing for a long time until laughter became contagious to all around. My grandfather asked God's forgiveness in a low voice and cleared his eyes with the back of his hand to shift his looks this time to the soldiers and mule-loads. Realizing what was in his mind I hastened to explain:

— We're on our way over there!

I said that and pointed to the mountain which was haunted by the blue haze of sunset and the hushed roar of guns. He nodded appreciation and turned to inspect my horse, patting its forehead, nostrils and forecurl suspending on the right side of its neck.

— It's a genuine Arab steed. You need not fear when riding it.

I came down and handed him the reins.

— Anyhow it performed its task, and shall stay with you until my return. Going through rugged mountain paths, as you know, is impossible on horseback. It is inevitable to use mules.

— Certainly I'll take good care of it, though the village is no longer safe. For a few days their gunfires have not stopped. Look!

Then he pointed with his stick to a dark gap which used to be a house one day. Then he pointed to his stable where the facade had suffered some damage.

— Even the stable was not spared. But, thank God, it was empty, since I had stopped horse-breeding years ago.

I said good-bye to my grandfather. Before turning with my group to the wilds I looked back to see him under the transparent darkness holding the horse by the reins, as I used to see him do throughout

the years of my childhood. I could not help calling out with a voice heavy with emotions:

— Grandpa, the mountain will not be larger than me this time. And I'll fetch you a Kudairi bird!

He did not answer. But I heard him laughing quietly.

(7)

Though my absence took two months, I came back to see the horse superbly active. Its smooth skin was quivering as if blue lightning was all over that elegant build. It was arching its neck and breathing out impatiently. So I was sure my grandfather had not left it go lazy all that period. But how he could pass that big valley path to exercise the horse despite his old age remains an open question.

He held the reins while I mounted the horse which started moving uneasily ready to go off. Looking carefully at the mountain, so rosy with the glow of the midday sun, I asked cunningly:

— Do they still shell your village, grandpa?

He stared in the same direction, then turned to look at that gap made by their shells, which had now been completely covered with a new growth of grass. Then he said:

— The mountain is completely quiet now that I am almost tempted to climb it one morning to catch some Kudairi birds. But how can I do that now that I have three legs? Anyhow there is enough good in you, old...

I bent the steed's neck towards the line of trees on my way to the town, muttering to myself "boy"!

But his voice reached me through the brisk gallop, echoing,

— ...fighter!

Translated by Dr. A.W. Lu'lu'a





## Balzac's Apple

I must admit that I am extremely happy because my friend has relented and invited me to visit him at his house. I feel so because I do not have much experience in story-writing as he does. The farthest I have gone is a few modest attempts which I dread to call stories. Moreover I have kept these stories imprisoned on my dust-covered book shelves.

He, on the other hand, is very famous. I hardly browse a magazine or a newspaper without seeing one of his stories on the top of its literary pages. And when I turn on the TV I see his bright face covering the silver screen as he talks about his story-writing experience. Late at night when all books, glasses and cigarettes fail to make me go to sleep I turn to the radio in the hope of enjoying some sweet music that can make me sleep. But instead I will suddenly hear his tender voice, which is similar to that of a professional announcer, presenting an accurate bibliography of his latest works.

It is a great honour. I could not control my quavering breath because of excitement

when I pressed the bell of his door. I was thinking of an appropriate way to greet him: Shall I say to him, "Good Day," "Peace be with you" or "Hello?"

But I forgot everything when his rosy face appeared from behind the door. He ignored my obscure humming while I was greeting him.

"You have come at the right time," he said pulling me inside. "As the bell rang I wrote the last word of my new story."

I followed him through a corridor illuminated by crystal chandeliers and surrounded by mirrors while I felt choked. How on earth did he manage to write a new story just twenty-four hours after publishing his latest one?

"I forgot to tell you." He said, "My anthology was published in Beirut."

He went on talking while I preceded him in entering his elegant study that reminded me of my poor and humble one.

I sat on a chair alongside a broad wooden desk where smooth mirror-like surface reflected my image.

I took my breath while I was awesomely looking around at tens of shelves loaded up with thick books and volumes. All these were placed beside each other with no single fold on either their front or back covers.

"No, please," his voice awaked me from my absent-mindedness. He gently pushed away my hand which tried unconsciously to fiddle with the handle of his desk's drawer. That was one of my foolish habits that might be the outcome of my frustrated adolescence period. Then, he locked the drawer with a small silver key.

"Pardon me," he said with a smile revealing his snow-white teeth. "I can't bear anyone else looking at the contents of this drawer. For, if this happened, God forbid, it would be the end of my stories."

He was astonished. I could not even stop gazing at him without twinkling my eyes.

"That is one of my rituals." He suggested patting me on the knee. "I hope you will keep it secret and won't take advantage of it by making it a press exclusive which newspapers will compete to snatch." And when I did not say a word, he continued with a puzzling tone. "What's the matter with you? Haven't you heard of great men of genius who have certain rituals to be followed when they start writing?"

He tapped with his index finger on the back cover of a book placed on a shelf alongside his head.

"Take Balzac for instance," he told me. "He could never write a word without some apple on his desk."

Did Balzac really mean to follow that ritual? In this case, he should have written his novels only in summer, for apple trees yield fruit here only in this season. But who knows? May be apple trees in France yield fruit throughout the year.

These thoughts continued to occupy my mind on my way home. There, I came face to face with my study which white ants compete with me for its worn-out books because of reading and re-reading them. The study received me with its gloominess

that could not be lightened even by the noon's sunshine which was flowing from the only window in the room.

Without wasting a moment I turned to the French novels' shelf. I took one of Balzac's novels "Father Goriot" to read it and search for that desired apple. But I was overwhelmed by the charm of Paris in the Nineteenth Century and the beautiful style of this genius as he described the luxurious hotel of Madam Fogue. I forgot why I took out this novel and went on reading it eagerly. From time to time I let my eyes rest by looking through the window out of which daytime was continuously disturbed.

"The Wild Ass's Skin" was the last novel by Balzac, which I read the day I went to visit my friend again overlooking my inferiority complex because he did not pay me the visit back as I was of a peasant origin.

In fact, the main motive for this visit was that I felt he made a fool of me the previous time. He thought I was so naive that he allowed himself to make fun of me by his joke about Balzac's apple. I finished reading all the novels of this man that were available in my study such as "Eugenie Grandet," "A Woman of Thirty" and "The Lily of the Valley." I read them all but I did not find any trace of the so-called apple.

The moment the leather chair squeaked under me I gulped down my saliva preparing myself to point at the subject by the most diplomatic means.

"Fancy that "The Times" has devoted its literary page to praise my latest books which were translated into English," he told me.

It was a lie. I am quite certain that he was lying this time like .... But he distracted me from remembering the one who used to lie like him, when he took away my hand that was engaged in practising that old habit.

"You are back to your fiddling?" he asked me. "Don't make me regret that I received you at my study and accorded you the honour of sitting by the desk on which I composed hundreds of stories."

Then he commented in a reproachful



tone. "Didn't I tell you during your previous visit that it was impossible for anyone else but me to look at the contents of this drawer?"

Before I had enough time to wet my dry lips with my tongue to answer him, he went on. "Anyhow this is a simple matter that cannot be compared to what Ibsen used to do. Imagine that it was impossible for him to start writing his plays unless he held the pen with his right hand. With his left hand ..."

Then he stopped. "What did he use to do with his left hand?" he asked.

In a spontaneous move, I raised my left hand to look at it just like a fortune teller who works hard to tell the future. But soon I let it lie down on my knee because I frankly do not think of my left hand in writing my modest works.

"You see?" he asked again. "You don't pay any attention to such matters because, please pardon me, you are classified as an ordinary human being."

He contemplated the palm of his rosy hand.

"He used to hold a scorpion with it."

Is this true? It would have been impossible for Ibsen to write his plays because the scorpion would have stung him.

I was so angry that I felt blood started to pulse through my temple. It was not because my friend confirmed my previous feeling that he looked down on me, but rather because I drew this logical conclusion only when I was back in my study.

I should have drawn that conclusion at that moment so that I could have given him a slap in the face. I took a deep breath trying to calm down myself. Then I counted up to one hundred while moving my eyes along the four walls that were covered with books. I was encountered by Dostoevski's novels placed indifferently beside each other as if their pages were full of liveliness and their characters were not trying to burst out of their skins.

I turned to look at the novels of Kafka and Faulkner who followed their great

predecessor in revealing human sufferings. At last, I saw Hemingway's novels and so my anger finally vanished. It was as if the dilemma of these novels' creator which had led him to put an end to his life by himself made me immune from my sudden anger.

Before I rushed to see Ibsen's plays I turned some books to make sure that white ants had not made fool of me recently.

I started counting weekdays by giving them the titles of the plays that I embarked on reading. For instance Saturday meant "Pillars of Society," Sunday was "A Doll's House," Monday was "The Wild Duck," Tuesday was "When We dead Awaken," Wednesday was "The Lady From the Sea" and Thursday ....

On Thursday, I came across something similar to what my friend had mentioned. At the beginning of "Peer Gynt" the translator mentions a paragraph from one of Ibsen's letters. He says that Ibsen used to put a scorpion in an empty glass on his desk. When the scorpion became restless Ibsen used to put a piece of apple for it. The scorpion would pounce on the apple to empty its poison and would calm down later.

From this, Ibsen draws a conclusion, "Isn't this our case too, we the poets?" A mischievous critic used this to attack one of Ibsen's plays, "He was right when he used to put a scorpion on his desk."

How can this comment be compared to what my friend has mentioned? Is holding a scorpion in hand similar to placing it into a glass?

I was fed up and had to put an end to my friend's mockeries. He was superior to me in creativeness as all audio-visual and printed media confirmed. I admit his study was better than mine in size and more elegant. He also wrote his stories on a desk which would cost me my salary for three months to buy. Yet, he should have respected my commitment to writing. Such commitment was so powerful that I dread to call my writing attempts stories.

Thus my anger took me on Friday to that

solemn leather chair determined not to allow him make fun of me again. I quickly turned the silver key in the drawer's latch of the desk and handed it over to him preparing myself to silence him with what I had read of Ibsen's works. But as usual he made my anger vanish by a sweet smile and returned the key to its place.

"Well done," he said. "At last you have won my absolute confidence by your innocent gesture. I am convinced that you now respect my rituals. Because I know you are of a rural origin and do not know deception, I'll leave the drawer open and I am sure that you will not look at its contents when I go to prepare two cups of coffee."

As any rural man who does not know deception I did not touch the drawer and I sat stiff on the chair interlocking my hands together and suppressing my old desire to fiddle with the nearest things next to me. When my friend came back carrying a tray with two cups of coffee, he burst into laughter.

"Great," he said, bursting with a laughter. "It's evident that you now perfectly respect my rituals." Then after a sip of coffee he added: "These rituals are actually more like the fate that chases men of genius. Only by these rituals are such men distinguished from ordinary men. Otherwise think of the suffering of a prominent creative man like Proust who locked himself in a room with cork lining to write his great novel."

Thus I finished from Ibsen's scorpion to imprison myself in Proust's room that had cork lining. A month passed and I was doing my utmost to read the three parts of the Arabic translation of his novel "In Search of Time Lost." I tested with the main character "Marseille" the flavour of cake dipped in tea, and was immersed with him in the memories of Combray as if they were flowing from inside that cup. I followed the romantic love story of Swann and roamed under "The Shadows of Flowery Young Girls."

It was a difficult story to read. It does not

yield itself easily as it is the case with every magnificent work. When I finished reading it, I found myself for the first time with an irresistible desire to write a real story.

I went to visit my friend again. "I wrote a story," I told him after drinking my unsweetened coffee in a single sip.

He looked at me with suspicion. But when he realized that I was serious he shook his head.

"You have come late to the world of fiction my friend," he told me in a quiet tone pointing at book-shelves around us. "What can you add to a world brimful of thousands of stories?"

He examined me carefully closing one eye as if he were aiming his rifle. "Also don't forget that you have missed the train." He continued. "We are both of the same age. You are just beginning your first attempts whereas I have printed ten collections. This is in addition to a collection about to be published in Tanjier, another being translated in Honolulu and a third to be published soon in Thailand."

I gathered all the anger that I felt towards him to overstep limits of courtesy and consideration and interrupted him:

"As a matter of fact I have only written four sections," I interrupted him ignoring all considerations of courtesy to express my mounting anger. "There are still the fifth section, and the title...."

And when he realized that it is impossible to dissuade me from my intention, he started to advise me that I need more reflection and more deliberation, because story writing is a difficult craft and does not bring to its writer but headache, and that as long as I was insisting to involve myself he had nothing to do but to give me a piece of advice. Then he fell silent for a while.

"You should choose a suitable title," he resumed his advice. "A good novel is known by its title just as a genius is known by his own ritual."

Damn it! He is trying to fool me again by one of his lies.

"I am in fact, hesitant between three



titles," I answered quickly.

"Take for instance 'A Scorpion in a Glass' don't you think it is suitable?" I asked him while I was looking directly into his eyes.

"A Scorpion in a Glass?" He asked feigning foolishness, but I did not let him take his time.

"Or the Cork Room" I said at once.

He frowned and tightened his mouth. So I said all I had, all at one time.

"It is better to call it 'Balzac's Apple'," I told him. "What do you think?"

"Are you making fun of me?"

He bellowed unexpectedly. The tidy book shelves that have never been touched by a hand echoed back his scream. He jumped up as if he were sitting on a spring. His rosy face turned pale and his body started to shudder as he was yelling.

"You should have thanked God because I received someone unknown like you. While journalists, local and foreign, can see me only by appointment to be fixed months

ahead." He answered angrily.

I did not expect that he would be so angry. I tried to make up for my mistake by apologizing to him. I smiled timidly at the time when my hand disobeyed my stern control and went on fiddling with the latch of the drawer enthusiastically.

My friend went mad as if I had surprised him with an unexpected slap on the back. He looked around opening his eyes widely searching for something to attack me with. He noticed my hand and suddenly attacked the drawer. Instead of closing it he pulled it out freeing it from its place, raised it high and began to wave with it in the air. It was quite empty. There was nothing in it but some dust which spread out in the air of the study.

At the moment when my head was threatened with danger, I got the fifth section of the novel as a flash.

Translated by Yania S. Atalla

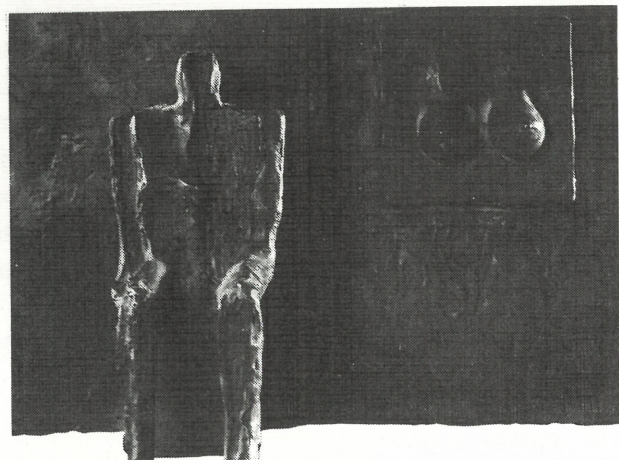
Abdul Khaliq al-Rikabi was born in 1946 in Wasit Province and in 1970 he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts.

In the late 1960s he published his first poetry collection entitled *Death Between the Sea and the Desert*.

His works include the following novels:

1. *A Window as Big as a Dream*
2. *Who opens the Talisman Gate*
3. *Agonies of Abdulla the Lover*

He has also published a short story collection entitled *Walls of Guns*.



# Khudeir Abdul-Amir

## The Boy

"When shall we arrive at the station, auntie?" asked the boy looking at the vast blue sky.

The woman in black murmured some encouraging words and asked him to wait.

The boy did not pay attention to the scenery on two sides of the road. He was rather listening to the beatings of the two horses' hooves on the lime ground and their echo within himself. When he stopped listening for a while, he was overwhelmed by his inner fears resulting from events he had heard of or seen and he used to recollect from time to time.

The carriage drawn by two horses was dashing forward. The carriage driver waved with his whip then strock the two horses' back. The roads were empty and almost deserted and the streets seemed spacious and wide.

His parents wanted him to travel with his aunt to another town far from Baghdad. They wanted to keep him away from the images of fear that he frequently see in elderly people, such as his family, relatives and some of his neighbours who would flock together and form a group of names, sounds and suppositions that remained or lost in the throng and tumult of reality visions. Then they came back everyday or everyhour in the form of sharp sounds and a ringing whiz in the sky associated with certain explosions somewhere.

Or when he would look at the sky during the night to see the projectors turning night's darkness into bright lines he used to feel that something was touching his heart and weighing heavily on his chest. It gave him dizzy confused states of mind which had never troubled him in the past.

He would ask himself for instance: 'Where is the moon...? Where are the stars? What are those remote lines which move instead of the usual silence of the sky?' Probably he feels the reality of war and his duty to defend his kith and kin interpreting to everything he had seen. Nevertheless, he was earnestly wondering.

He started to recall the accounts of horror which young and old people were telling. They were about war, destruction and the planes that drop bombs and destroy houses upon their dwellers in the far and near areas.

In his mind, the war was a vague picture repeatedly represented in several sounds and scenes. He experienced it through a crowd gathering round the radio of a tea-house and through his father's fear. In his mind he shaped a picture of the war through others' accounts or his parents' talks or through certain impressions he makes while sitting with his friends in a corner of the lane leading to Ghazi street. Sometimes the picture of the war would come back to him in the morning or in the



evening with the whistle of sirens urging people to hide immediately in the houses and shelters. But what attracted his attention and changed these recurring pictures in his mind was the scene of the lines of troops marching from Bab el-Sharqi towards Bab el-Mu'adham or in the opposite direction.

Those troops were accompanied by cars and mules loaded with ammunition and weapons. They were marching in a procession. The boy was looking at the soldiers, their uniform, their brown faces and their hands carrying rifles on their shoulders. He got a shiver in his body. It was not fear, it was rather like tremblings of one struck with awe.

While he was listening to the sounds of brass trumpets passing by, he felt like crying and wished he were as old as those soldiers so as to join them or walk behind them, behind marching troops.

Another picture of the war was developing in his mind on a new basis. The picture was neither of destruction nor of fear or anxiety. Yet he felt a new lease of life. He felt its strength that could actually lead him towards other perceptions with which he was unfamiliar.

'So this is the picture of the war,' he says to himself. 'This is its preliminary image which grants man the delight of self-confidence, the delight of being finally victorious or being a fighter in its front lines even though such a desire could lead him to death.'

The troops through their march in the streets, left a great impact on the people, they brought about several suggestions in the minds of all people: the children, the youngmen, the old men and the veiled women.

Life would change bringing about joy coloured with hope and full of confidence, then a new course of life would start through the existence of those simple people whom he saw and was aware of their feelings and sufferings. Despite his tender age he afterwards adjusted his view of those people's individual lives into line with these

outward sights as reflected in their common lives.

The carriage was going slowly round an area planted with trees and vegetables. It entered a side road leading to the main road and the station. The carriage was moving along that quiet road covered by tall trees. With the exception of the sound of the carriage, silence was exhaustive. The doors seemed closed from afar. The side streets including the installations of the station, its anterooms, its stores and the halls were calm. The boy and his aunt heard nothing but the echo of the carriage's sound, the growl of the two horses, caused by the bridle and the rein. The carriage driver pulled the horses back in an effort to stop the carriage.

When one horse panted out of tiredness the carriage driver patted on its croup. The boy jumped out of the carriage and began to pick up some of his aunt's luggage. The carriage was empty. The boy with his aunt turned to the booking-office. A whizz rushed from a distance and the warning siren burst out in a wailing sound.

The boy and his aunt could not enter the passengers hall. The doors were closed. The carriage driver could not drive his carriage, yet all he could do was to draw the two horses around a place where their front legs were stumbling. The carriage was so heavy and the shade was so small that it was difficult to turn the carriage. The carriage and the two horses almost disappeared under the shadows of the trees. The carriage driver got the boy and his aunt squatted down in a waterless ditch. They took hold of the dry branches of trees. They felt the earth wet under their feet, and the vast expanse of sky had been totally obscured from their sight by the leaves and branches of tall eucalyptus trees. Because of fear, they only stared at the place where they were sitting.

The sounds of the planes were loud and not far from the place. They were hearing the sound of explosions coming from both far and near places. Fires not far off seemed

to be bursting into flames and the blazes were rising from that part of the sky which was visible from there. As they looked at the sky, they found that it was taking on the colour of flame which was burning and its rising smoke.

For the boy, this scene meant nothing. He was neither overwhelmed with fear nor dismay as was the case at home where he would hear and look around hopelessly. He was rather captivated by new scenes which he felt taking shape by remote unknown powers. He turned his eyes towards the carriage driver and found him standing near a trunk. He was holding the rein of his horses which were moving and kicking the ground. He seemed to be easing off the horses and strongly holding the straps of the rein for fear that the carriage should fall in the ditch and the two horses escape. When the carriage driver saw that the boy was looking attentively at him he began to mumble indistinct words. What the boy understood from him was that he expressed his regret at going out in such a day. Suddenly, silence prevailed after the cessation of bombing and the immediate subsidence of everything.

'Let's go back, auntie,' said the boy. Looking at the sky she told him to wait for a while.

Her lips were muttering prayers, Quranic recitations and God's tributes. The driver began to look at the sky and put the bridle straight in preparation for setting out by his carriage.

His aunt decided to return by the same carriage after giving up any hope of leaving. She had been to the town to see her sister and stay with her for a couple of days.

At night, as he heard the members of his family talking about him, he made up his mind to speak, to voice his opinion and to tell them that he won't go, in case they insisted on sending him away. He remembered his words while he was asking his aunt about the station. He felt embarrassed and even ashamed of himself and of his question. Moreover, the picture of his

father seemed to shake before his eyes as he saw him at a loss not knowing how to treat him. The nights became longer the lanes became darker and the sky was full of search-lights. The sounds of explosions could be heard from a distance. Baghdad was quiet and families began to get together in groups to avoid loneliness and anxiety.

His parents moved into their relatives' house at the same lane. It was a large one with a spacious yard surrounded by oblong rooms. There was also a basement with a door long closed and neglected as nobody used it. The two families decided to use this room as a shelter. His father together with his relative eventually managed to open basement's door. The boy watched attentively and looked particularly at that door which led to a disused and chilly basement room.

They brought an oil lamp into the room. The faint light of the oil lamp dissipated some darkness of the haunted room and changed it into a thin brown colour; and the things inside became more visible. The women began to sweep heaps of dust from the room, and washed the brick-paved floor and furnished it with mats and carpets. An oil lamp was hung on a wall and the large room became ready for use.

The boy was overwhelmed with a fresh feeling; he became attached to this large house and his relatives, as their moves, noise, chats and laughters dissipated his loneliness, and put his mind at ease. Even his father seemed to feel better than before.

The large two-storeyed house was built more than fifty years ago. Its occupants lived part of the year in this house and the other part in a house inside a thickly-grown grove of date palm trees at a village called Karara on the Tigris river's bank. Therefore the rooms of the house and its furniture were exposed to neglect and old age. The patch of sky over the house's yard seemed very high. It looked like a square encompassing the inner space of the house, and the walls around the house were like a frame for this patch of the blue sky at which members of



the family looked in anxiety and fear.

His father's relative would even go up the stairs, and stand on the top of the house waiting for raiding enemy planes, or carefully listening to the sound of artillery from afar. Coming down the stairs he would look in a good psychological state and start talking about things he heard or saw outside the house. They were stories about people's role in resisting British troops. He would say, for example, how a man brought down a plane by a gun's shot or how another threw a hatchet at a low-flying plane and he would elaborate on how people would drive the British forces out of Sinel-Dhiban and al-Habbaniya camps.

The boy's father used to listen and never talked. He did not take part in the conversation. He did not go to the top of the house as his relative used to do. He used to sit on a wooden bench in the yard feeling secure.

The idea of his aunt going back to her distant and quiet town came after the news that the British were advancing and that fighting has intensified. His mother proposed to her to take the boy with her for his safety. The boy's father hired a carriage and asked the driver to take the boy and his aunt to the south-bound train station. He urged them to write to him upon arrival. The station was empty, the doors were closed and there was no train moving or giving off steam or giving forth sound. There was no passer-by whom the aunt could ask about the train departure or when the doors of the passengers' hall would open. The siren produced a loud shrill noise assuring people that the air raid was over. The driver was standing behind the two horses, while the boy and the woman with their belongings were in the carriage on their way home. The driver was flogging the two horses with his whip as he looked at the bright blue sky which a few moments ago was obscured by the smoke of fires. He urged his horses on.

The aunt returned to his sister's house and the mother received her boy. In the

lane, the women got together and had a chat. The aunt talked about her unaccomplished trip, describing her fear and difficult experiences and the horrible sounds she heard. She stressed her words narrating stories about certain events which the boy had neither seen nor heard. The boy waited for his father's arrival. In the meantime, he met with his friends and told them the story of his unsuccessful trip. When they responded with silence, he felt ashamed. He tried to recall what had happened and put it before them to make them to speak, but they did not say a word about his trip. Their silence was deep. He felt that he was trying to escape and they were staying. He wanted to go away from the sounds of the artillery and they did not bother about those things.

They were patient or indifferent. He envied them from the bottom of his heart. He wondered: who had made him think about leaving his home, his neighbourhood and his friends? Was it his aunt's opinion? Or was it of his father's desire. Why did he agree to leave? How unaware he was of the people's presence, the driver for instance, the men in the street, the large number of soldiers marching, the children in the neighbourhood flocked around the soldiers and distributed water among them; how inattentive he was of the women's thrilling cries of joy bursting out of throats as they saw their sons marching on! How unconcerned he was about the crowded girls watching the parade of troops proceeding towards Babel-Mu'adham! How uninterested he was in the men sitting in the tea-house and listening to the radio, in the clatters of the horses' hoofs on the hard floor of the street! How careless he was towards hundreds of helmeted horsemen as they passed by upright, their bodies moving in a manner consistent with the horses' trotting paces, their guns were hanging from their shoulders and the saddles of their clear horses glistened under the sunshine!

They were only marching and that picture of the events remained vivid in the boy's imagination. Its parts were combined into a

whole in order to form a new value of the war which differed from the one he had seen and heard at the train station; the war of which he had felt fear and sometimes he had been indifferent to in such a manner that he could not understand fully what was going on and how the fires and the planes had ended. Nevertheless he had returned home with his aunt. His return changed several things; he could see things in a more serious way. He began to pay close attention to things he did not understand in the past. Hence, he felt more ashamed of himself. He began to look at the faces of his friends and his neighbours. He viewed them from this altering and different standpoint.

He was filled with admiration for them.

Life gradually returned to normal. People began to go out in the streets; some of the tea-houses began to open for short period and receive their customers. Some of them had nothing to talk about but the everyday events in which they had been involved; the sound of the siren did not mean anything to them, even the sounds of some explosions drew their attention only for a few moments; they would listen to the sounds and begin to give their opinions or resume their talks. Some of the shops began to open; the men and the women crowded into the lanes and the shops; the women baked bread in their clay-lined ovens and let the smoke rise, the pieces of bread were taken to the markets; once again the donkeys with their ringing bells around their necks were on their way in the morning to the vegetable marketplace as in old days, the markets seemed to be full of all kinds of goods. The stream of soldiers did not stop; the sounds of trumpets did not die away, the roar of the armoured vehicles covered with the palm leaves and tree branches did not cease; the resounding noise of the mule's hoofs as they were loaded with boxes did not end and the passing of the horsemen in khaki and helmets did not stop. Their necks swayed in a harmonious manner like the horses'

trotting paces. The young horses' colourful bodies were shining and stirring joy in the hearts of the people standing on both sides of the road; the boy felt secure, comfortable and confident. Everything before him took the mode of heroism, love and victory.

This street which had been deserted in the past was bustling with life again and the lanes returned to their previous life; all the doors of houses seemed open; some men were sitting on the benches, some women were weaving the wool threads together..

The loud noise of the children broke up the depressing silence and when the sound of a machine gun rose in the distance the boys pointed out and said 'It's ours, it's our machine gun's sound.'

Enemy planes passed over the town, their whizzing sounds loudened, heads were turned to the planes and even the hands fearlessly pointed to them. A few days ago the boy was standing there frightened from their sounds. The whole town stood curiously and unconcerned. The planes did not stir but the air around them. To the people the explosions of the bombs were mere sounds that lasted for a short time and could not break the calm and the order in a large town; they could not disturb life of the men who had realised the value of life and death. However these sounds and explosions were only black spots and landmarks here and there, indicating facts and events.

The boy collected and stored facts in his memory; he continued to live from hour to hour and from day to day with his family, his relatives and with the people surrounding him. He recalled the early days when he rode with his aunt on the carriage; when he looked at the sights of the street and the two horses, at their long skinny necks, at their thighs, at their hind legs, at their hoofs beating on the asphalt of the street, at the carriage driver hiding the carriage from the planes under the trees; and he remembered the journey home.



And whenever there was a strange noise in the sky, he or other people would raise their heads and look up in the sky uncon-

cerned. The strange noise would soon pass and its echo would die away among other sounds in the town.

*Translated by Hrant Aghajan*

## The Castle

The castle lay so far from popular neighborhoods in Baghdad that one might consider it in another city.

The old city itself, which was built by Al-Mansour, was small, circular and inter-linked by narrow alleys leading to one main road alongside which there were several shops with wooden and tin sheet ceilings.

Across these brown brick buildings, the eastern embankment in Al-Rusafa meanders to surround houses and people, isolating them from remote and vast stretches of desert.

The castle was built on a high ground. None of the people living in the shanties behind the embankment could reach it. For some, it was too far, for others it was frightening to approach.

That castle was a deserted old house built on a high ground. No one knew when exactly it was built. Some said it was left by a wealthy man for his children and grandchildren.

A pretty woman came to see the estate-agent who was squatting down in a small room in Khan (inn) Kubba.

"Well, the house or the castle as they call it is what I want. I have seen it twice, once from a distance and the second time I had a closer look. I heard the tales woven round it by the people living in the reed-mat huts and shanties. I know some exaggerate and

make a fuss out of nothing, but I believe that there is something inside the castle, that made those who lived in it restless," she said.

Then she whispered, "There are many things they cannot reveal. Instead they reflect these things on what is there around them."

"Madam I can neither say no, nor yes," said the estate-agent as if defending himself, "My job as an estate-agent is to find someone who rents this castle, though I have to tell my clients the truth. But here I am standing hesitant because you are a lonely woman as you said. What can I say to myself, my consciousness, my folks and my wife if I rent the castle to you? I mean a lonely woman like you. You are a..."

"You are a beautiful woman," he said, "the castle is far away from the city and urban areas. How are you going to spend your days and nights? Moreover you know that it is unwanted even by the largest families because of its ill-reputation. Then this is not an attitude of mine. It is rather dictated by the inheritors of this house to immortalize the memory of their old grandfather. Well, anyhow it's long story."

The pretty woman smiled. "Thanks for being kind to me. I don't care about all these matters, and cannot see what I have heard about the deserted castle and the

ghosts living in it by some kind of illusions and fantasies. The only problem is that the castle is far away from the city, people and urban areas, thus it has become a symbol of remoteness and mystery. Many of these people did not take the trouble to find out anything about it, and how it was like living there. For years no one has lived in it because all feared something unknown inside." She turned back and looked as if she were talking to herself. "I bet Mr Rahim that all stories about its ghosts are some kind of illusion."

Rahim, who lived in a room in Khan Kubba felt that this woman was really strong and she had something supernatural which had impressed him when she talked with her face turned away. That appeared on her defined features in her fixed looks and face. He then decided to strike a deal in his own benefit as well as that of this woman whom he hardly knew. However she seemed to know him quite well and knew everything about the castle.

During the first night, she was alone with few pieces of furniture and her bed that lay in a room overlooking the outside open space. There were also the curtains that she had brought with her and hanged up to cover the bare windows that were marked off by bars.

She had a deep sleep and during that nothing came to her mind but confused facts of which she remembered nothing. In the morning she was in a new state of mind. She felt happy because the house was quiet. She tried to put some pieces of furniture in the empty places, and did what she wanted. She decorated the room with lamps, chinaware, crystal and other luxury requirements until the place became redolent of fresh scents. The castle looked different and was surrounded with calm and pleasant intimacy that would grant a lonely person warmth and turn his silence into a whispering language. Such intimacy would

rid one of his fear as he lives between these familiar corners lying in the open space of a deserted house, or of a still quiet room.

The inhabitants saw from afar a pretty woman with calm and peaceful features. She was happy, or seemed to be so. She was so calm that one would envy her. Nothing happened to her. In other words, she neither died in her bed nor did she return to where she came from. Also she left them no chance to tell new and strange stories about the castle.

They were amazed. But their amazement vanished with the passage of time. The tale of the deserted house became so old that no one would remember it. But it was only mentioned to set an example of the strong power of will of this woman. She was determined to stay and face the fearful unknown which made people refrain from living in deserted houses surrounded by a halo of silence and desolation.

The pretty woman lived alone with a white cat that she once saw mysteriously feeling the place near the outside door. Then, she got used to it to keep her company.

Days were not monotonous for her and the cat in this castle. Once, on a rainy day, the cat came near her bed and got into it. In the morning, she saw this domestic animal looking at her with two beautiful green eyes.

She stretched her hand, and the cat came close to her. She started to pat its soft hair with her gentle hands. But when she got fed up she left it alone.

The cat felt its way fearfully towards her but she soothed it letting her feel that everything was quiet, safe and peaceful.

The next night she dreamt that she was standing in the middle of the house's yard. A white halo of dazzling light was surrounding her. She wished she could wake up to cut off the link between her consciousness and the unknown world of her dream. But



she could not.

She knew and felt that it was a dream. So she left herself standing amid the white illuminating halo and went to sleep. In the morning she woke up to find beside her a precious necklace, while the cat was lying just nearby.

She turned the necklace over with her hands, then lifted it up and looked at its beads in the light after she had drawn away the curtains to let sunlight enter her room so as to see the necklace quite well. Its beads reflected sunlight into various colours. She was not very much surprised. She brought the necklace close to her heart as if she were thanking somebody or were so keen on it. She looked for the cat but could not find it.

She took the necklace to a safe place and locked it away inside a small box which she hid in a cupboard. Then she sat in her place thinking. Signs of concern and curiosity appeared on her face. "It's the cat and no one else," she was saying to herself as she got up.

Hours later the white cat came in and headed towards the kitchen as if it were searching for food or someone, or perhaps for her. She turned to it and received it with a smile. The cat jumped to her stretched hands, rested between her palms, leant on her chest and looked at her with its clear round green eyes.

"Hello, she said, "where have you been my dear? I have waited for you so long," The cat mewed, jumped on the dining-table and waited there.

At night the cat was with her. She neither felt lonely nor did she think of even going out. The castle was her world. There was something new after that silence and desolation. She made up her mind to challenge the reality that she had suggested to herself. She was not afraid of the tranquillity of the house nor had she the desire to talk to anyone. Also she was not afraid by the

gossip of some people about her staying in the house, or even by her own suspicions.

During that dark night a wind started to blow quickly. Nothing could check. At that depressing moment she felt she was facing up to a stronger power. She began talking in a loud voice and then turned her face towards the cat.

"How can I be frightened and you are beside me. How can I feel lonely and you are keeping me company. I have lived isolated from people. That is why I am no more concerned about those who try to dissuade me from being here by gossip and tales. You, the white pure spirit, come here. Come closer, you pretty soul."

The cat was under her palm while she was caressing its smooth white hair. The blowing wind pushed doors and windows, shook the iron sheets of the shanties and fiddled with the reed-mats of huts. Before she went to sleep, she thought about those people living there and who must be sleeping by now under the power of a forcible dismay. She was very tired and felt there was some hidden power outside her house. She, the proud pretty woman, was trying to seek protection in her own courage to encounter a state of weakness and surrender to suspicions.

In the middle of that dark night a glow of light filled her room. She woke up and tried to move but she could not. The room seemed to her very big with larger windows, and there was some change in the furniture.

"Let me move and get up of my bed to see what's going on," she murmured with fear. She wanted to overcome this state with which she was completely taken up. This seemed to be resulting from sleeplessness and lack of sober mind. She strived to get up, and she did at last. She found that everything was in order. Her room, bed and the whole place were as she had always known. She finally admitted to herself that she was dreaming.

She turned to the cat's place but did not find it. She saw the door open although she had closed it before going to bed. She put on her nightgown and looked for the cat.

The cat was standing behind the door. A few moments later it opened the door and went out. She took her Abba (black gown) and followed the cat.

It was a vast area totally covered with darkness. But the cat did not go out of her sight. She followed it closely. She was overcome by an unprecedented determination to discover this riddle. She was just as happy as someone who had found out or was about to find out something.

The distant scattered houses seemed hidden behind the bank of earth surrounding the city in Al-Rusafa side. Nothing appeared from inside the reed-mat huts and sheet-iron shanties but faint beams of a fading fire. The light of the fire was reflected by hundred of holes and tens of cracks which were like glittering eyes of crouching animals.

She walked on rifted ground, passed between thorny plants, got down into small pits and came across black structures of poles fixed in the open air. The wind abated and the place was completely silent. The cat went away but not in a hurry. She followed it until it reached an area where the houses were attached to each other. She guessed that the place was somewhere near the city.

It was too dark to see the cat clearly. She hurried up and saw it standing by the door of a very big house. She stopped not far away from it, leant against a corner and watched it.

The cat pushed the door with its head and glided along a dark corridor. She followed it quickly and disappeared in the darkness. In the centre of the open space the cat turned into a man and began climbing brick stairs. The pretty woman leant against the house's walls while clinging to them until she

reached the second floor.

There she saw a beautiful woman preparing dinner. The man who looked young came near her. Then she embraced him. "What have kept you late? I've been waiting for you. Did you fall in love with that woman?" she said.

"No, I am not in love with her, but she is pretty and friendly. I tried first to frighten her but she seemed strong. Everything there is beautiful, elegant, comfortable and cosy. I liked the place. She is nice, compassionate and has a big heart."

"A big heart? Do you mean that I have no heart?" she said with a smile. He did not answer and remained hesitant before her. Then he tried to kiss her but she angrily pushed him away.

The pretty woman remained in her place. The couple had dinner. Then, the woman brought him a cup of coffee with a sleeping potion. Drinking his coffee he felt numb and sleepy. She dragged him to his bed. The woman put on a coat, took her Abba, opened the door and went out to an unknown destination.

The pretty woman was alone with the sleeping young man.

"Now I picked up the end of the thread," she said to herself.

She went downstairs, opened the door and went out. The day was just dawning. She heard distant noises of people heading to their work.

She went back home just like a phantom sneaking to its hiding place at dawn after finishing its duty or aimless tour in the infinite space.

In the morning, she found the cat at her place. She tried to tell it something but she could not. She was not frightened, but wanted to proceed with her adventure and discover the things that were taking shape in her mind as unfamiliar tales, legends and new images. Here, she sees these things



taking place so why shouldn't she proceed with them to the end.

"Every tale has an end and I want to know about the tale of this," she repeated.

She started to take care of the cat in a new manner, by tenderly chatting with it about various topics, telling it some touching tales, coming closer to it, and caressing its white hair. The cat responded to her hands and looked at her with pretty piercing and glittering eyes. It was about to say something. But for unknown reason it kept silent.

After midnight, the cat left her bed. She followed it and was determined this time to stay there and not to come back quickly.

She followed it along the same path and places. But the night was cold and the sky was still. There was not much wind then and stars were filling the space with shivering light which would give sense of security. She was happy and very confident.

While she was following the cat, she passed by reed-mat huts. She could hear some voices and the barking of distant dog which was soon followed by another. She hurried after the cat began to run quickly.

She stopped before the same door as before and saw the cat pushing it with its head, going in and leaving the door open. The pretty woman went in after the cat and hid behind a curtain in a pitch-dark corner.

"Hasn't time come yet to release me and let me go back to my world?" the woman said after having the meal she had prepared.

"So you don't want me and you seem you were never in love with me," the man said in a reproachful tone.

"I have loved you from the very beginning," she said. "But I feel now I was a prisoner of your love. It is high time we returned to our folks and changed our faces and appearances. People here have begun to ask questions about me living here alone."

"But I am not on good terms with my folk because of you," he said. "I ran away with you at the beginning and you were satisfied. I abandoned my private life, folk, position and even my own world and put on various masks. If it hadn't been for this woman, I would have been by myself now. She really takes care of me and she is lonely just like you. You know that I can't stand noise ever since I have lived in that castle. When I saw her I gave up setting traps and doing others harm. I said: 'You angle, here you are living with a lonely woman, so try to be kind to her as long as she is kind to you.'

"Of course," the woman said sharply. "I have tried living here on earth and found it boring. I want to go back. Do you hear me? I want to go back."

He bowed his head and tried to be friendly with her. But she seemed unconscious or living in another world. The young man was put to sleep again. Then she changed her clothes and got ready to leave.

The pretty woman changed her hiding place, took cover at another corner on the road.

The woman passed in a hurry by the alleys, corners and turnings followed by the pretty woman. The lanes were dark and the thick darkness of the night added to the blackness of the narrow paths that would not allow more than one person to pass. Then she was behind the embankment in a vast area stretching alongside the boundaries of the city of Baghdad where some plants grew on the edge of a swamp filled with flood water from the Tigris. There was also a small town of reed-mat huts.

The woman reached an iron-sheet shanty from whose holes came the glow of a soft light. She entered after knocking at a low iron-sheet door.

"Why have you been late?" said a man inside. "The fire was about to die down."

"We talked about many subjects tonight" she answered. I waited until he finished his

meal and then I made him drink the coffee."

"Your coffee is dangerous," the man said laughing.

"Remember this always, and don't be like him," warned the woman. "Why should I be blamed. He is in love with another woman". Their voices faded away while the flame remained shaking languidly.

The pretty woman, wrapped up in black clothes and disguised by a veil, went back home hoping to find the cat, or the angel, at her house.

When she entered the house she found nothing but the quiet night and the sound of insects. These were crouching in the cracks of the ground, and behind thorny plants and bushes on plains irrigated by flood waters and winter rain.

In the morning, the mewing of the cat in the open space of the house woke her up. She got up of her bed distressed. She felt sorry for the cat, the angel. She thought of its sacrifice and separation from its own world. She imagined it wandering in unfamiliar places and settling in a new world where it could neither appear in its first shape nor in the second because it would lose everything including its capability to change from an invisible shape to a visible one. What he had done, and might do again, was just because he wanted to be faithful to the woman he loved and moved from his strange and invisible world to a familiar clear one. But did this woman, who came with him, deserve this sacrifice?

She opened the door, picked up the cat and had it on her lap. She carried it to the kitchen where she prepared a special breakfast for it. She asked it to sit on a chair and have breakfast with her exactly as a man.

"Listen cat," said the pretty woman. "I want to tell you a story of a woman, I heard myself. Perhaps it can be a lesson for both of us."

The cat looked at her in pleasant silence and shook its head.

"Once, there was a pretty woman living in a district in Baghdad. She fell in love with a young man. They agreed to get married. Days later she saw him with another woman with whom he was sweet-talking and promising to be faithful. When the first woman told him that he was betraying her with another woman he told her that he did not want her and he was only playing. The duped woman abandoned everything, took her money and jewels, and rented a house far away from the city. All people feared this house and did not wish to live in it. She sought death in this house to rid herself of her sorrows. But her love of life resisted her endeavour. In her loneliness, she found a friend in a splendid pretty white cat which was like an angel."

The cat shook off when it heard this name. Then it calmed down.

"The woman loved this cat after discovering its secret by following it at midnight" she continued. "But what did she see? She saw his beloved, who ran away with him, betraying him with a man living in an iron-sheet shanty. She goes to this man after putting a sleeping potion in the coffee of her beloved to make him sleep, and then she goes out by herself. Thus the woman uncovered this secret."

Before she finished, the cat turned into a shy young man who looked distressed and humiliated. He came closer and kissed her hand.

"Today I'll find out everything by myself" he said leaving the table without having his breakfast. "I trust you, but I want to see for myself what you have told me about."

"I wish I hadn't told you this right now, this morning," she said. "I wish I had left the whole matter till night."

"Don't worry my dear madam," he said, "You have told me the truth. I don't want to move between the two houses while I am



duped."

That night he did not drink the coffee, but pretended to have it and that he was asleep. Then he got up and followed her. She entered the iron-sheet shanty and was received by the man inside. He stood outside facing the cracks on which the fire's light was flickering. He tried to do something such as blotting out the whole shanty. But he hesitated.

"Let me leave her to her misery," he thought. "It is a misfortune that will hit a person hard when he exposes his profound sentiments to destruction. Let me leave her for her fate. I was determined to marry her after moving to the castle and settling our problems with my folk. But let me now go back to that pure and virtuous woman in my present shape."

The cat was intimate companion for this pretty woman. It kept her company in her loneliness, and mewed beside her. They understood each other. It listened to her when she talked, opened doors with its paws and head, sat on its backside near her feet, joined her at the dining table and ate in a special plate.

People living nearby waited to see her leave either paralysed by fear, or dead. Even the house agent expected awful things to happen. But all those influxes of illusion started to die down with the passage of time as the woman remained in that castle.

She had a good deal of thinking and lived

in a world of fancy and dreams. She was lover herself. But she was disappointed in her love after she discovered that the man whom she loved was betraying her. At a moment of weakness she came to live in a house shrouded in mystery. She was able to overcome this bitter experience after that daydream granted her an effective power and made her capable of acting as a clever and courageous woman. Sometimes, when she retired to herself she recalled all the events she had gone through. She thought of everything she had seen as if it were a reality represented by familiar characters and places. She could remember all that. But what puzzled her was the precious necklace which she had found one day. She held it in her hand and looked closely to its bright side. She did not find the necklace which she locked away in her own box. She neither found these lanes along which she walked at night nor did she see the house to which she sneaked. Also she knew nothing about the woman whom she followed.

The iron-sheet shanties appeared remote, closely attached to each other, and she could not recognize that isolated shanty which was opposite to the reed-mat huts.

She remained perplexed with the presence of the white cat. But soon her perplexity disappeared for her fancies became remote blurred images. She began to smile again, and hang on to life as an undefeated woman with strong determination.

Translated by Yania S. Atalla

Khudeir Abdul-Amir was born in Baghdad in 1934. His first story was published in *Al-Sha'b* daily in 1956.

His main story collections are as follows:

*Al-Sa'ada Bath House and other stories*, 1964, *Departure*, 1968, *Return of the Faltering Man*, 1970, *No Hope for Gilgamesh*, (a novel), 1971, *There was a Tale*, 1974, *Tent for Uncle Hassan*, 1974, *Modern symbols*, 1976, *Windmill*, 1979, *Warm Winter Wind*, 1982, *This Side of the Town*, (a novel), 1984, *Stars in Day Sky*, 1985.

For children, he wrote the following stories:

*Wood-cutter and Sparrow*, *Twenty Two Stories for Children* and *Enchanted Bird* and *Brave Girl*.

## The Modernist Trend in the Iraqi Short Story The 1950's

Dr. Muhsin Jassim al-Musawi\*

Despite the increasing literary interest in the Iraqi short story, its rise and transition, a little has been written about the "modernist trend" of the 1950's, especially in view of its advocates' assessment of their own experience and its impact. While a critical analysis of their literary products may well lead to some conclusions regarding the literary significance of such products, a careful investigation of those writers' borrowings and readings and their basic attitudes towards indigenous and social issues is necessary to appraise their role in creating a period of expansion in so far as culture and thought are concerned.<sup>(1)</sup> Such an approach will also ensure a better understanding of the whole climate of thought in the late 1940's and afterwards when artists, poets and story writers began to develop a sharper sense of identity that left its stamp on their own works and writings. Whether emerging in their selection of themes or in their experimentation with styles, it is this sharp sense of identity in a changing society and life which we should associate with the "modernist" trend in the Iraqi short story.

Rather than a mere call for change that gathered momentum in the late 1940's, the modernist trend evolved as a reaction to a number of traditional values that were also associated with traditional themes and techniques, according to the advocates of change. On the political side, the Second World War as well as the emerging Palestinian question along with the nature of colonialism in the area drove intellectuals to participate in the political life of the period. Others developed some affiliations with political parties. As the political life then came either under the impact of leftist thought or in response to the pressing national feeling of commitment, intellectuals were mostly divided into Marxist or nationalistic groups. Among the latter group there emerged, however, a number of existentialist writers and translators who were initially driven away from the Marxist side by the growing Marxist antagonism to Existentialism as a philosophical attitude.

Finding a temporary outlet in the Iraqi *Modern Thought* in the mid-1940's and later in the Lebanese monthly *Al-Adeeb* these writers proved to be no less influential than their committed colleagues<sup>(2)</sup>. It was through the Lebanese monthly *Al-Adab*, however,

that Iraqi writers and translators of the 1950's found a channel of expression that made it possible for their views to be in vogue.

Whether in affiliation with political groups or in temporary response to political issues, most intellectuals of the late 1940's and early 1950's developed a sense of opposition to state institutions and politics. Aside from writing to the dailies, intellectuals found their own forums such as the *Modern Thought* (1946) to express their own attitudes within a cultural context. In this as in other periodicals and journals, a great deal was written not only regarding the Zionist conspiracy to occupy Palestine but also about the need of Iraq and other Arab countries for national independence and political freedom. Within the scope of this essay it is enough, however, to refer to the short story writers' political attitudes as expressed in a number of their own writings.

Two of the most prominent advocates of modernism in literature, Abdul Malik Noori and Fu'ad al-Tikerli, felt that a change in literature is impossible without the writer's sense of change and revolt against traditions and values including the status quo. In so far as the political scene is concerned, they both reached some mutual understanding that the country was increasingly in need of a radical change that would put an end to the state of things as they were at the time. In a letter dated December 29, 1952, Noori wrote to Al-Tikerli in memorial of Al-Wathba national uprising of 1948.

"I am saddened to see that this day, the anniversary of Al-Wathba is passing without a great happening overtaking my dear country, to raise it to the level of nations fighting for their own freedom. I am the more depressed, however, to feel that I am unable to do something, no matter how little. I actually wished that day I were a student, for I imagine that students are more responsive to the needs of the beloved country. What is more depressing to me is that I am forced to keep silent, to tie my tongue, and to suppress my feeling and love for my suffering country."<sup>(3)</sup>

Noori wrote the *Deaf Wall* not only as an expression of his notion that established authority, represented by prison officers, is deaf to the people's sufferings, but also as an indication of his view that people are bound to undergo some change under the





Al-Sayyab: advocate of modernism in poetry

impact of state repression. His protagonist Sattar was only a figure of fun whose drinks were usually paid for in order to amuse others. One day, he remembered his jailed son Qaduri who used to advise him not to play the clown's role for the sake of a drink. Such a remembrance drove him to join people who demonstrated in front of the prison while the police were shooting at both the prisoners and the demonstrators. Eventually, Sattar loses that sense of fun, developing instead, an attitude of utter grimness and depression that brings him nothing but poverty and neglect. But he is no longer a parasite. Sattar is bound to suffer under a system that provides only for the useless and the reprobate.

No less controversial is Al-Tikerli's approach to internal politics and institutionalized action. Although avowedly against the government and its dependence on foreign powers during the period under discussion, Al-Tikerli maintained an understanding of story writing away from traditional views that had already been in vogue. According to him, social and political themes entail no limitations on art. On the contrary, the more the writer gets involved in political and social life the more respect and understanding he should entertain for individuals. As such he concentrates on the individual, his reaction and response towards the whole outside world, including its traditional views and customs. In his short story *The Others*, Al-Tikerli depicts a young female taking care of her bed-ridden sick mother. Outside demonstrations are rampant against rulers and their politics. The more she listens to demonstrators' enthusiastic shouts and slogans the more attached she feels to their cause. Torn between two choices, to stay with her mother or to join action, the girl decides to commit herself to action. But rather than a mere political choice, the



Ayoub: Scratching the Surface

writer associates her choice with a feeling for a young demonstrator beaten by the police.

Others also developed a different line of analysis or depiction when writing stories with political themes. Unlike traditional narratives that care for plotted action and descriptive discourse, story writers of the fifties care more for the individual, both in action or in dialogue with himself. In Muhammad Roznamchi's *The Street, the Men and Yellow Helmets*, the young son sets a question for his mother about his elder brother. The question triggers so many reminiscences in the mother's mind regarding her life and her elder son's involvement in politics that we develop an overview not only about her son's suffering and agony but also about the government's methods of torture and persecution.

Another writer, Abdul Samad Khanaka depicts his protagonist while walking along Al-Rashid Street in Baghdad, listening to broadcasting stations that deal with the Palestinian issue rhetorically, but expressing in interior monologues his feeling of repugnance and hatred towards lying and deceitful governments. Nazar Selim, on the other hand, develops no such interest in individual reactions. Mainly interested in effects and attitudes, he anticipates the sufferings of the Palestinian people, describing in *Ghosts Without Shadows* a number of people crowded in front of a radio set, gathering news about their scattered families.<sup>(4)</sup>

More pertinent to the study of the modernist trend is the writers' social outlook. While deeply interested in social life and behaviours, young story writers, in their stories and critical assessments, showed a sense of revolt not only against traditional values and political institutions, but also against views of literature as a social document. Although calling for a better understanding of basic problems

and ways of thinking and behaviour, they rejected a great deal of the writings of the period as superficial social treatises lacking artistry and depth.

When assessing Thu al-Noon Ayoub's role and impact in an article that appeared in 1953, Abdul Malik Noori acknowledged Ayoub's pioneering role as an ardent social reformer, praising his contributions to literary realism. While explaining how a number of writers, including himself, came under Ayoub's impact during their early literary grounding till the mid forties, Noori made it clear that he no longer maintained the same appreciation which had been already entertained for Ayoub's works. According to current standards of taste and methods of writing, Ayoub "narrates the real in his own stories...without searching beyond the surface of things. He never reaches the common in human feelings. Neither does he dig for the current that runs always behind."<sup>(5)</sup>

Although Ayoub reacted strongly against Noori's assessment,<sup>(6)</sup> there developed among literary circles a taste for such attitudes against traditional narratives or classical poetry. In an earlier letter to Al-Tikerli (dated September 21, 1952) Noori mentioned that both he and Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, the other advocate of modernism in poetry, planned to write a joint article against Al-Sawari for his praise of Al-Jawaheri, "the poet of classical rhetoric," as they called the poet who was considered by Mehdi Al-Qazas in 1944 as the only advocate of poetry, "who has a poem or two every week that carry within its texture whatever that thrills the soul."<sup>(7)</sup>

While coinciding with other reactions against descriptive narratives, traditional views of the Qasida (Arab poem) as well as against conventions in art, such literary attitudes developed also into a line of thought against the concentration of matter at the expense of art even among the new generation of writers. Noori, for one, criticized his colleague Abdul Samad Khanaka for the dominance of social ideas in his collection of stories *In the Forest* (1952). Referring in the same essay on Ayoub to his contemporary Shakir Khusbak, Noori acknowledged Khusbak's stylistic simplicity and clarity, but he found him inclined towards copying the real. But rather than a mere rejection of social realism Noori's attitude was directed only against superficial portraiture. As such, he praised in the same essay on Ayoub a number of story writers and poets for their "intense responsiveness to surrounding life." In specifying the poet Kadhim Jawad and both story writers Abdul Samad Khanaka and Mehdi Issa al-Saqr, he admired "their continuous struggle to express it (their surrounding life) artistically."

It was Fu'ad al-Tikerli, however, who gained his friend's full appreciation. After providing the reader with a lively description of Al-Tikerli which never

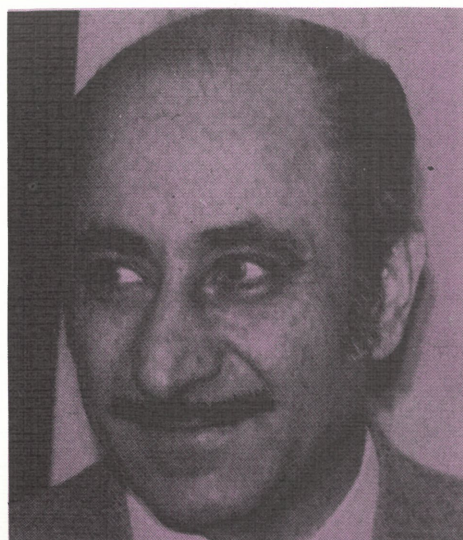
loses its sincerity and warmth, Noori concentrates on Al-Tikerli's presentation of his protagonists who are similar to their creator "full with life, throbbing with this strange passionate drive. You actually feel that they are exceptionally alive as well. You are bound to share them their own lives. It is impossible for you to go back to your own life until you come to the conclusion of the story. It is then that you realize how you are living with them, mediating upon their fortunes." He also explains how Al-Tikerli responds to life, with its political problems or social ills, to its people as well as to their inner thoughts.

Such an analysis of Al-Tikerli's character and art may well attest to Noori's role as a rare creative writer. While undergoing a change himself under the impact of foreign literature, he never felt that he had attained to the desired standard.<sup>(8)</sup> The more acquainted he got with foreign literature, the greater was his feeling that he had a long ahead of him. Bearing in mind his commitment to refinement in methods of writing, it was not surprising to find him praising Al-Tikerli as the most promising story writer among the advocates of modernism in literature. Around that time Al-Tikerli wrote his polemic against Suhail Idris, *Al-Adab* Editor-in-Chief.<sup>(9)</sup> In that article Al-Tikerli made the most consistent statement in defence of the new "wave" in story writing in the fifties.

According to Al-Tikerli the mere "representation of environment" cannot produce "a real literature" neither can the "pretentious endeavour" express people's sufferings. While attachment to one's environment and the sincere search for a deeper understanding of one's own society are essential to story writing, a writer has to be also well-acquainted with the depiction of characters in action beside the necessary art of representation of conflict and the reaching of hidden psychological predilections and desires. Comparing the writers mentioned by Idris as representative of Iraqi story writing with the known writers of the world, he described the "conventional" group as lacking in artistry and knowledge. "Most of their stories are daily reports of the kind we find at police stations. They are void of the least care for art, for they are poor imitations of story-tellers' anecdotes which we still find in Baghdad coffee-shops"

In this as in other scattered disputes one may trace a number of points worth discussing in order to assess the modernist trend in Iraqi story writing. While the new advocates call for an art based on a deeper understanding of the real in the Iraqi society, they also suggest that it can not be realised without a careful study of this art as produced by the most acknowledged writers of the genre. Abdul Malik Noori himself came under those writers' impact, as his personal friend Ferid al-Sa'di explains.<sup>(10)</sup> In his early collection of stories *Humanity Messengers*





*Al-Tikerli: Social and political themes entail no limitations on art.*

(1946), Noori concentrates more on the external aspects of social life. But it is possible to trace in a story or two some deviation from this concern with the exterior of things and relationships. In *Omar Beg Al-Sa'di* notices that Noori cares "for artistic atmosphere, psychological analysis, hidden desires and the stream of consciousness more than for plot and description." Moreover Noori wrote another story, *Remaining Ashes*, originally in English, evolving naturally as "an outlet not only for long-sustained impressions accumulating into his own mind, but also for the lively feeling held into his inner self subsequent to his steady reading in English." As his letters to Al-Tikerli indicate, Noori was an avid reader of foreign literature, especially Russian, French and American. Indeed, he was so taken with Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Steinbeck, Flaubert and Sartre that some of their ideas and attitudes crept into his most admired writings. Their influence is so obvious that some of his opponents accused him of plagiarism rather than imitation. But the accusation went too far, for Noori used to write while drinking heavily, letting his ideas fuse into his own readings in a desperate search for perfection.

No less devoted the study and reading of foreign literature was Noori's bosom friend Fu'ad al-Tikerli. As their exchanged letters indicate, they used to discuss their latest readings, exchange opinions on new releases and reach some conclusions regarding each writer's attitude and technique. They also used to discuss such issues with al-Tikerli's brother, Nihad, who had been so prolific as a writer and translator from English and French that he influenced a whole literary group in the fifties. Whether through Nihad al-Tikerli's writings, the *Adab Monthly* or through the very medium of foreign languages, a whole generation came into contact with foreign cultures, developing simultaneously a



*Nazar Selim: great interest in effects and attitudes*

special taste for realism as an attitude and existentialism as a philosophy. To many, the latter philosophy seemed even in tune with Dostoevsky who happened to be the most influential then among story writers. While such an influence profited many, it thwarted others' spontaneity like Noori and Khusbak. As a consequence Noori became too hesitant and self-critical to develop the right frame of mind for more story writing.<sup>(12)</sup>

It is the salient aspect in literary influences which is worth considering, however, especially during the late forties and early fifties. Faced with well-established conventions in literature and the arts, many poets, artists and story writers searched technically for new channels of expression that could cope with their growing sense of defiance and revolt. While poets found in T.S. Eliot and others some methods and techniques worth emulating, artists looked for the Polish and the French in their search for innovation.<sup>(13)</sup> Story writers knew, however, that influences should only be a light spark to kindle their intimate comprehension of their immediate environment. While stressing the local and the real, therefore, these writers gained from their readings only to the extent of promoting their general outlook. Writing to Al-Tikerli on January 8, 1951, Noori acknowledged the necessity of "emulating a great writer," without overlooking the national and native elements. As such in a letter of October 4, 1950, he admired, for instance, Tolstoy's "depth" and "simplicity" trying to reach the same effect in his *Little Man*. What interested him most in Dostoevsky is the latter's "idea of heroism that centres on the defiance of society" at large, making use of this idea in a number of his own stories, especially *Nausea*, *Deaf Wall* and *Aboud*.

More important, however, is Fu'ad al-Tikerli's approach to foreign literature on the one hand and to social issues on the other. While keenly interested

in reading every writer of some merit, he has developed a critical mind about such readings. Although making use of his acquaintance with foreign and Arabic literature to refine his technique, he is more of an artist by nature, devoting his time to work on the refinement of his few literary pieces. The instinctive artist within him is always worried lest the burdens of life, including relationships, draw his attention away from his own literary career.<sup>(14)</sup>

In most of Al-Tikerli's stories as well as in some other writings by Noori, Al-Saqr, Kusbak, Nazar Selim, Khanaqa and Roznamchi, one can trace a number of identical interests that may well attest to the emergence of a new outlook that greatly varies from the one usually associated with Ayoub, Abdul Majeed Lutfi and Ja'far al-Khalili. While concentrating mostly on the individual under a certain stress, these writers tried to depict this individual in action, challenging long-established values or assumptions. More often, such individuals are "little men" or eccentrics like Noori's Aboud, or Al-Tikerli's protagonist in *The Way to the Town*. They may be intellectuals like some of Nazar Selim's characters, or Noori's Ameen in *Nausea*, or Muhammad Ja'far in al-Tikerli's *The Other Side*. But the most distinguished aspect about such protagonists is their obsessive nature. Coming upon them at a moment of agony and distress, story writers drive them either to confess, to remember things past or to come into conflict with the outside world. It is this outside, represented by institutions or inhibitions, assumptions and social customs, which becomes more than a hell for intellectuals in a number of stories.

Beside this aspect, however, the reader's attention may be drawn to these writers' interest in the urban scene. Whether concentrating on hotels, coffee-shops, bars or trains and old houses, writers in the fifties developed a new sense of the city as a rather mysterious creation where individuals move as chessmen on a chessboard. Despite their endeavour to act willfully, these individuals are driven to frustration and failure. Noori's boy in the *Little Man* is expected to act as a grown-up, taking care of his own ailing mother. Asked to fetch his married sister who lives in another district, the boy fails not only to find her own house, but also to act as expected. Frightened by darkness in that deserted quarter, he imagines being followed and hunted by ghosts, finding himself shouting for help, calling his own mother to come for his assistance. A worse ending awaits Fu'ad's young people in *Sympathy*. Leading a life of entertainment and joy, these young men have never thought of the city but as a place of amusement. After attending a party where they have got drunk, they are stopped by other men who accuse them of misbehaviour. Some are beaten to death, while Jabbar escapes only through running away

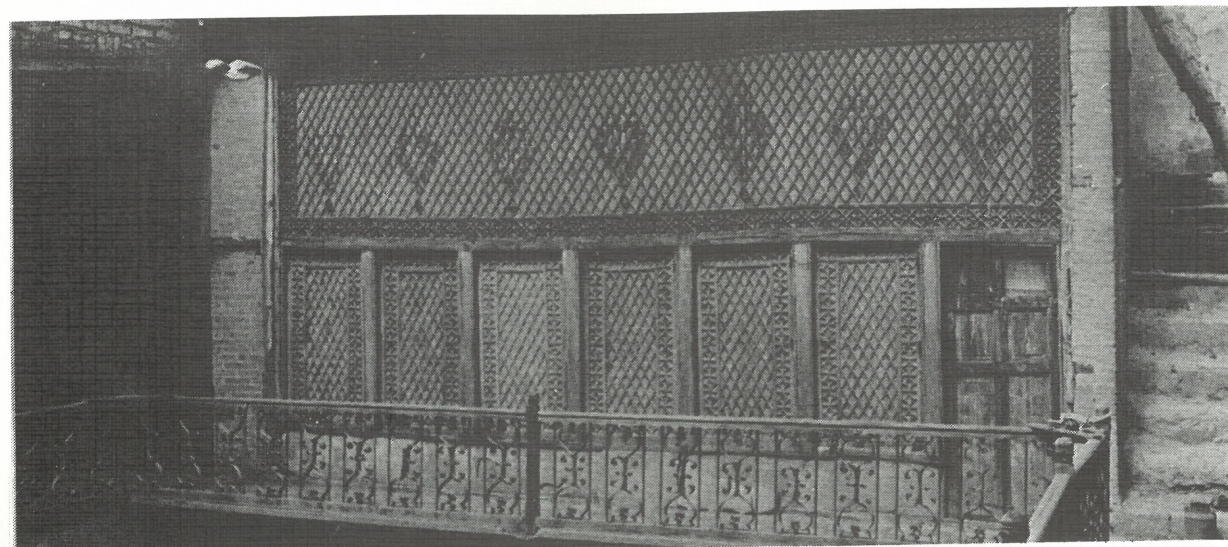
from the whole scene, feeling a tremendous sense of guilt when trying to reconstruct in his own mind that scene of violence and death.

Some other writers depict such scenes in a reversal-of-fortune technique. In the *Diamond Ring* Khusbak, for instance, introduces the protagonist who describes to us his acquisition of the diamond ring. A car cleaner suggests to sell him a diamond ring worth a lot of money. The protagonist tries his best to get the ring for some little money, threatening the cleaner to fetch the police and accuse him of theft. Taking hold of the ring, he takes every possible care not to lose, only to find later that it becomes so much of a nuisance to him, that he should give it to the police. To his disappointment, the officer at the police station explains to him that it is one of many forged rings and that the cleaner has played similar tricks on many.

The city, however, is not only a place for thieves, forgers and criminals, but also a place for prostitution. This is a topic that draws the attention of many a writer in the fifties. But rather than dealing with it in black and white terms, describing it as a social problem, these writers of the fifties approach it from numerous angles that concentrate always on the individual rather than the general side of things. Noori's *Nausea*, for instance, concentrates not on the pimp who spends some time in order to persuade Ameen to join him, neither does it concentrate on the prostitute. It rather deals with the protagonist himself. Left by his own wife and driven to loneliness and despair, he decides to experience this side of city life. But affronted with this situation, his wife's image comes back to his mind, driving him — to the whore's surprise — to run away. More sophisticated is Al-Tikerli's approach to this issue in *Green Eyes*. Coming upon Selima the whore in the train, the writer chooses the moment when the train passes by a certain town which Selima knows. It is in that town that once a young man comes to her as a prostitute, only to develop a passionate lover for her which elevates her feelings, provoking within her some hope for a better life. The affair is frustrated, however, but through the stream of consciousness technique we come across an experience that distinguishes *Green Eyes* as one of the best stories of the fifties.

In this as in many other stories of struggle and failure, achievement and frustration, writers in the fifties came upon issues that touch people's lives, not as mere masses, but as individuals who may well be remembered by their readers, as Noori rightly explains in reference to Al-Tikerli. It is not only the point of view which the writers of the fifties cared for: neither is it the protagonist's interior experience. While paying attention to these aspects as necessary to the art of story writing, they mostly developed a sense of consistent self-evaluation. It is





A traditional Baghdadi house, many stories written in the 1950s depict events which took place in such houses.

this sense which certainly entails a perpetual search for perfection which is impossible to attain, but which may well lie at the basis of any modernist endeavour in the arts. It is this attitude, along with a

feeling of commitment for national culture, which coincides with a growing sense of identity in every sphere of national life and culture.

#### Footnotes

\*The author is a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Baghdad University, College of Arts. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of *Afaq Arabiya* and Director General of its publishing house. This paper is his contribution on cultural change in the Arab world to Rutgers University seminar, "Culture as a Dynamic Force of Change."

(1) "A period of Expansion" is used by writers, especially Mathew Arnold, to refer to a period of transformation and change when dialogue is necessary to promote culture.

(2) *Modern Thought* appeared in 1946, carrying articles on Palestine and the attitude of intellectuals towards the whole issue. It also published a number of articles on culture and change. The reader may check as well Abdul Illah Ahmad, *Story Writing in Iraq Since Second World War* (in Arabic, Baghdad, 1977); also Omar Talib, *The Modern Short Story in Iraq* (Baghdad, 1979-in Arabic).

(3) Letter of 29 January, 1952. This and subsequent references to letters in MS form are mentioned for the first time in the present writer's book, *The Modernist Trend in the Iraqi Story* (Baghdad; International Library, in Arabic, 1984).

(4) Abdul Samad Khanaqa's collection appeared in 1952; whereas Nazar Selim's stories appeared in his collection, *Useless Things* (1950) and *Overflow*

(1952).

(5) Noori's article appeared in the *Hour's News* (Akhar al-Sa'a), 2 May, 1953, titled "Mere Images from Our Literary Life."

(6) For more on this controversy, see *The Modernist Trend*.

(7) Mehdi al-Qazas, "Literary Gatherings in Baghdad," *Al-Adeeb*, February 5, 1944.

(8) Noori made numerous references to his writing, see the *Modernist Trend*... pp.7-76

(9) *The Week Magazine* May 15, 1953. See also *The Modernist Trend*...

(10) "Fatoma's Author," *Al-Adeeb*, (January 1, 1949).

(11) See Kadhum Jawad and Muhi al-Deen Ismael, *Al-Adab* (May 5, 1954); and (August 1954), subsequently.

(12) See *The Modernist Trend*...p. 7-76.

(13) On the impact of the Polish and French art, see J. Hamodi, "Contemporary Iraqi Art, Modern Thought, 5-6 (1946).

(14) See the reference of his letter of January 9, 1951, the *Modernist Trend*.. p. 79.

## Iraqi Theatre 1921 - 1958

Ahmed F. Al-Mafraji



Actors of Al-Tafayudh School in the 1920s

The period 1921-1958 followed the end of the Ottoman rule in Iraq which was characterized by political, economic and social setbacks.

It started with the coronation of King Faisal I who ruled until his death in 1933. He was succeeded by his son King Ghazi who was assassinated in April 1939. Afterwards Abdul Illah was appointed Regent until 1953 when King Faisal II was crowned King of Iraq. From 1921 to 1958, fifty eight cabinets assumed power in Iraq. Though each of these cabinets had its own policy, they all showed the same allegiance to the King and his policy.

Moreover, several political parties and societies were formed with the objective of overthrowing monarchy. The emergence of such parties and societies reflected a new course of modernization and development that arose in the Iraqi society before the 1958 Revolution. This era also witnessed the founding of various administrative, health and educational institutions, and the enactment of new laws and regulations following the establishment of what was then termed as the National Government.

This period was preceded by four decades of

dramatic activity from 1880 to 1921. The plays presented at that period were generally educational and staged in schools.

The study however does not cover every aspect related to the theatrical movement since tens of theatre companies were formed and a large number of plays were presented during that period.

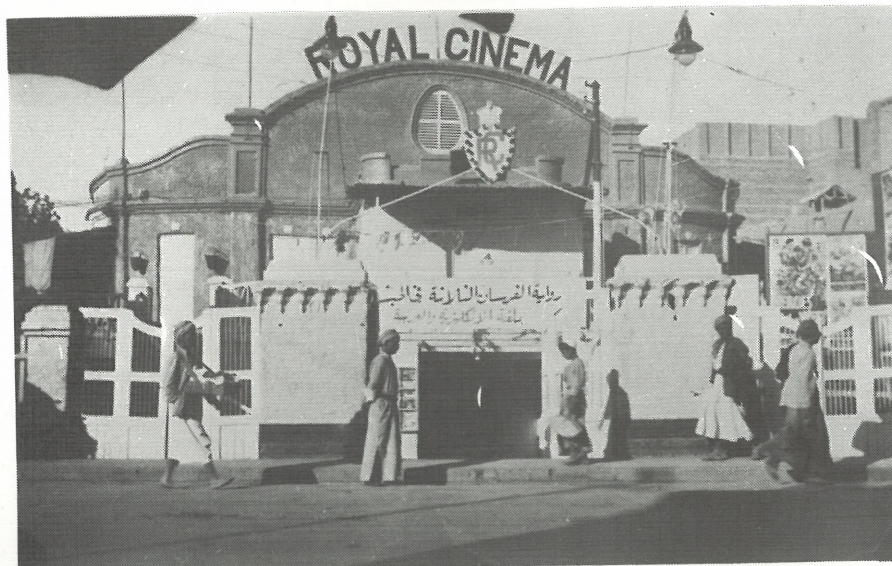
To get a true picture of the Iraqi theatre at the time, one has to study its main aspects such as the attitude of the state, and the social, artistic and cultural aspects of theatre.

The available bibliographies on leading Iraqi actors and playwrights helped a great deal to produce this paper.

Also magazines and newspapers published at that period were of great help.

The most important documents in this field were those found in the Ministries of Interior and Social Affairs, the Municipality of Baghdad and other municipal units in the provinces. Theatrical activities were supervised by these offices at that time. Moreover, public and private libraries also contained various theatrical works including translated plays.





Many plays were presented at Cinema Royal which was built in 1928

All these documents and sources on theatrical production of that period are now kept at the Theatrical Documentation Section at the Cinema and Theatre Authority.

Theatrical activities differ from time to time, hence Iraqi theatre did not establish itself until the foundation of the Theatre Department at the Institute of Fine Arts by the renowned Iraqi artist Haqqi al-Shibli after his return from Paris in the early 1940s and the establishment of the Popular Theatre Company, the Modern Theatre Company and the Independent Theatre Company.

### The State and Theatre

Although a new administration known as the National Government was formed under King Faisal I, some laws, regulations and legislations of the Ottoman Rule and the British Mandate remained in effect.

Theatre Companies were licensed under Society Law No.45, enacted in 1922. With rapidly growing theatrical activities and theatre companies, new by-laws were enacted to organise such a cultural activity in the country.

In September 1940, a three-man-committee, including Kamal Ibrahim, Abdul Malik al-Amin and Haqqi al-Shibli, was set up to examine play texts and scripts.

In October 1940, the Ministry of Social Affairs officially asked theatrical companies to present their play texts and scripts to the committee.

With the new regulations and by-laws in force, only companies which were licensed by the then Ministry of Interior, were allowed to perform and stage their plays in Baghdad and other parts of the country.

In 1946, the Ministry of Social Affairs exempted

play texts of educational nature presented in schools.

Now that the Ministry's interest had become more apparent, all theatre companies were asked in 1947 to provide it with appropriate information about their activities. Companies which failed to do so in two weeks time were abolished.

Commenting on the Ministry's measures, *Al-Alam Al-Arabi* newspaper said, "It is quite interesting that the Ministry has begun to looking seriously into the theatre in the country. What is required, however, is to establish local theatres. This would be appreciated since plays are being performed in night clubs and bars, which are not fit for play acting."

The Ministry of Social Affairs, consequently issued a set of regulations to organise theatrical activities banning dance bands, trivial songs and monologues in the performances. Play texts should be properly selected, coloured with national spirit and social ethics, but free of excessive propaganda, stressed the new regulations.

In the meantime, according to the Ministry's regulations, "only actors who show particular aptitude for performance should be eligible to hold corresponding titles."

The State's involvement in theatre became more apparent as the Ministry of Education sought to set up a national theatre company. In his capacity as head of the Theatre Department in the Institute of Fine Arts, Haqqi al-Shibli made many attempts to organise such a company. He made many contacts with Zaki Tlimat of Egypt and asked for advice from the Egyptian National Company.

When the national movement for independence as a whole was subjected to different forms of oppression, theatre was not exception. Many play texts were rejected while some companies were banned such as the Modern Theatre Company and the Independent

Theatre Company. Some actors were jailed and others exiled.

When the actors together with the country's intellectuals protested against the then government's indifference towards the Israeli aggression against Egypt in 1956, many were arrested, such as Jassim al-Uboudi and Yousif al-Ani were exiled to remote villages.

The Arab Theatre Company founded by Mohammed Khalis al-Mulla Hammadi was the first company to be licensed in accordance with the new regulations following Iraq's independence from the Ottoman rule and the enactment of the Societies Law.

Many other companies were set up between 1921-1940, including among others, the National Theatre Company with the objective of presenting standard Arabic texts dealing with national and social reform.

One active company was Muntada al-Tahtib (The Educational Club). It displayed in its debut in 1923 *Ghifran al-Ameer* (The Prince's Pardon). Before the display Marouf al-Rusafi, a renowned Iraqi Poet recited a poem and Polina Hassoon, a prominent Iraqi journalist delivered a speech. This became an established tradition and was observed before presenting any play and continued until late 1940s.

There were other leading companies in 1920s such as the New Theatre Company set up by Muhideen Mohammed in 1929 and Arts Reviving Society in Baghdad.

In 1930s numerous companies were founded in-

Yahya Faiq.

Another group called "Jam'iyat Ansar al-Tamtheel" (Acting Supporters' Society) was licensed in 1934. It involved pioneer actors such as Abdulla al-Azzawi, Fawzi Muhsin al-Amin, Salim Butti, Ahmed Haqqi, Abdul Hamid Kadhum, Abdul Majeed Abbas and Hanna Putros.

This was a prolific society. It presented many plays such as *Al-Maskeen* (The Poor), *Waheeda* (The Lonely), *Majnoon Layla* Abdul Rahman al-Nasir and *Qatal Akheeh* (The Killer of his own Brother). All these were directed by the head of society, Abdullah al-Azzawi.

Al-Azzawi who worked for Baghdad Radio since 1950, and later moved to work with Cinema and Theatre Authority until his death in the late 1960s, became a film star in *Alya and Issam* and *Layla in Iraq*.

These two prominent companies together with Babel Theatre Company, run by Mahmoud Shawkat, played a major role in the development of Iraqi theatrical movement in 1930s. They were eventually merged as a result of their similar approaches and views and a new company under the name of The Tripartite Theatre Union was formed. However, it was a short-lived union.

There were more companies which contributed greatly to theatrical movement in the country such as the Educational Theatre Society. Of its prominent actors were Saleem Aziz and Elia Dawood. It presented many plays such as *Al-Shamam al-Arabi* (Arab Pride) by Sulaiman al-Saigh.



Artist Yousif Al-Ani during rehearsals on a play in the 1950s

cluding the Scientific Institute Company, headed by Abdul Hamid al-Bushri. It was renamed later as the Arab Theatre Company and the Institute was closed down. It comprised, among others, Safa' Mustafa, Isamel Haqqi and Faiq Hassan, the famous painter. The company was closely linked with dramatist

The Theatre Department at the Institute of Fine Arts had been also instrumental in the 1940s. Its students and teachers presented many famous plays including Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* which was directed by Haqqi al-Shibli. Actors were Mohammed al-Qaissi, Taha Salim, Wajeed Abdul Ghani, Khalil



Shawqi, Sami Abdul Hammed, Badri Hassoon Farid, Carlo Haretium, Abdul Maseeh Meeri, Sahib Haddad, Jalal Ibrahim Haqqi, Ja'far al-Wardi, Abdul Majeed al-Azzawi and others. Hafidh al-Durobi and Ismail al-Sheikhli, the painters, participated in this play as designers.

In the 1940s, the Popular Theatre Company which staged its debut *Shuhada al-Wataniya* (Martyrs of Patriotism), directed by Ibrahim Jalal. This Company became very active between 1950-1958. It presented many plays such as *Al-Fulus* (The Money) by the Turkish playwright Najeeb Fadhil and *Al-Qubla al-Qatila* (The Fatal Kiss) directed by Ja'far al-Sa'di. In 1955 three more plays were presented and directed by Badri Hassoon Farid and Ja'far al-Sa'di.

Of the companies licensed during the 1950s was the Modern Theatre Company with Ibrahim Jalal as director. The company played a leading role in the modern movement of Iraqi theatre and among its members were Yousif al-Ani, Abdul Rahman Bahjat, Ya'qoub Al-Amin, to mention a few.

This company was very prolific. It first presented six local and foreign plays such as *Othillo*, *Awdat al-Muhathab* (The Return of the Educated), *Maku Shughul* (No Job) and others.

In 1953, the company began its rehearsals on two plays namely *Mu Khosh Isha* (A Bad Living) and *Ras al-Shilila* (The Beginning of the Thread) by Yousif al-Ani and directed by Ibrahim Jalal. However, the two plays were banned by the authorities. So was the case with *Hatha al-Majnoon* (This Crazy), written by Sa'di Mohammed Salih and directed by Sami Abdul Hamid.

In 1955, however, the company presented *To'mor Beg* (Yes Sir) and *Maku Shughul* (No Job), by Yousif al-Ani, directed by Jassim al-Uboudi.

Besides, school, college and society theatre companies began to display different performances. These include, among others, *Lo Bilsirajeen Lo Bil-*

*dhalma* (Two Lamps or None) and *Fulus al-Duwa'* (Money for Medicine) by Yousif al-Ani.

In 1956, the company presented *The Swan Song* by Chekhov and *Sit Darahim* (Six Shillings), directed by Ibrahim Jalal. *Al-Rajul Alathi Tazawaja Imra'a Kharsa'* (The Man who Married a Dumb Woman) was presented in 1957.

The Government accused the company of being involved in politics and did not refer its play texts for examination to the committee concerned. The license was thus withdrawn and the company was not allowed to work.

This proves that intellectuals, dramatists including playwrights and actors were indeed exposing the then governments' misdeeds and policy as being contrary to the people's interests, and that the companies had been instrumental in unmasking social ills and the authorities' mishandlings.

Two more active companies emerged in the 1950s, namely The Independent Theatre Company set up by Jassim al-Uboudi and the Vanguard Theatre Company formed by Badri Hassoon Farid. Al-Uboudi's Company which was licensed in 1954 presented three plays *Al-Ghorfa al-Mushtaraka* (Common Room), *Asdiqa* (Friends), and *Al-Khubuz Al-Musmoom* (Poisoned Bread). Farid directed four plays including *Al-Lus Wal-Shurta* (The Thief and the Police), *Muf-tah al-Najah* (Key to Success) and others.

In 1957, more theatre companies were licensed such as Nujoom al-Masrah Company, Al-Nahdha al-Arabiya Company, Ri'ayat al-Adab wal-Funoon Company, Ashtarout Company and Yahya Faiq Company. The activity of some of these was limited to schools and institutes.

### Writing Play Texts

Demand grew for plays with the development of theatrical-activities in Iraq during 1921-1958.

Another factor was the absence of translated texts which prompted many writers to write for theatre. Some of these plays were staged while others were only published in collections.

Playwrights of the 1920s derived their themes from Arab and Islamic history. Certain events were turned into dialogue and scenario which lacked dramatic construction. A playwright's main objective was to impregnate the scene with such phrases which would either entertain the audience or show opposition to foreign occupation.

In the 1930s, a radical change took place in the approach towards drama. Dramatists tended to show interest in tackling problems and themes of modern age with emphasis on social changes which the Iraqi Society was undergoing.

Many plays revolved around such themes as love, marriage, divorce, rent problems, alcohol abuse, greediness of some doctors, stories from the life of civil servants and the like. However, there were, plays which touched upon nationalism, liberation, independence, the Palestinian question and the Algerian Revolution.

Among the prominent dramatists of the time were Yahya Abdul Wahid, Musa al-Shabindar, Salim Butti, Safa' Mustafa and Yousif al-Ani. Nearly 60 plays of different themes were written over the period 1921-1958.

### Drama Direction

It is difficult to know the names of dramatists and stage directors of the period between 1880-1921, except for Na'om Fat-Hallah Sahhar who was in charge of art activities in the Clerical School in Mosul in the late nineteenth century.

Records of the time also mention Em'anoel Rassam

who directed play for the School of Kuldans in Baghdad. Rassam, a Priest, was described by *Al-Arab* newspaper in 1918 as a successful director.

*Al-Mosul* newspaper, on August 19, 1921, wrote about the staging of *Saladdin al-Ayoubi*, by Al-Hadhariya al-Islamiya School.

However, with the growing number of art and drama societies and theatre companies there was a further need for drama direction.

Nevertheless, directing techniques maintained the very approach followed in the period under the British mandate. But with the influx of Indian, English, Turkish and Arab Companies, some of Iraqi dramatists and drama lovers found new sources of entertainment and learning. Thus they began to imitate these groups.

This experience was further enriched as many Iraqi dramatists including Yahya Fa'iq, Haqqi al-Shibli and Safa' Mustafa visited other countries. Yahya Fa'iq went to Syria where he became acquainted with the performances of Syrian dramatists who were influenced by the French theatre. Haqqi al-Shibli lived in Egypt and France for several years. Safa' Mustafa studied music in Germany.

There were other dramatists who played a major role in the development of Iraqi drama. These included Hanna al-Rassam, Abdul Majeed al-Bushri, Sabri Dhweeb and Abdullah al-Azzawi.

Al-Shibli's role, however, was perhaps, the more prominent in the 1940s drama in Iraq. He worked as lecturer of drama direction at the Baghdad Institute of Fine Arts.

Most of Iraq's famous actors, including Ibrahim Jalal, Ja'far al-Sa'di and Jassim al-Uboudi were Al-Shibli's students and hence he is seen by many as the father of Iraqi drama.

Translated by Hassan A. Hafidh



The Theatre Group of Al-Tafayudh School in 1925



Artist Haqqi Al-Shibli as Antonio in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar in the 1930s





Naqqart is one of the percussion instruments used widely in performing Iraqi folk music

## Some aspects of Iraqi music

Bassim Hanna Petros

Music in Iraq is as old as history itself. It has been a major part of the Mesopotamian civilisation as archaeological finds prove. In the 1920s for example archaeologists unearthed what is believed to be the oldest musical instrument in the world, dating back to the third millennium BC. It is known as the Sumerian harp and was discovered at the Royal cemetery at Ur. It is a well constructed instrument with developed tonal pitches. The golden bull head which is used to decorate the instrument adds to its beauty. Archaeologists have also discovered a large number of sculptures in the form of musical instruments in Babylon, Sumer, Akkadia, Assyria and Hatra. All these bear witness to the development of music in ancient Iraq. During the Abbasid era (750-1258) music became a highly sophisticated art to the extent that it left its marks on world music in general and the European music in particular.

The present day music in Iraq is the outcome of a rich musical heritage which has been handed over to successive generations orally. There has not been great dependence on musical notations because the destruction which was brought on Baghdad at the hands of Hulegu did not spare libraries and written material. Among these, large numbers of notations have been destroyed and those which have reached us do not give a true picture of the state of music in those days. Musicians, therefore, played a major part in preserving the Iraqi musical heritage through oral recitation.

Two major types of music have reached us in this way and have become well-known in the Twentieth century. The first type is widely known in the large cities, and it can be called as classical music. The other type is the country music and is referred to as folk music.

These two types have existed in Iraq and were affected by various circumstances the country had gone through. Many types of musical forms emerged as a result of this interaction producing what is known as the Iraqi *Maqam* and the country music known as *Reefi* songs and others.

Iraqi music has a lot in common with the music of other oriental nations in Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean in terms of natural melodies, compositions or even forms used extensively in those areas. It should be stressed, however, that the main feature of Iraqi music is that it is part of a greater unit which

forms Arab music in general. Within this scope one can find the local characteristics which are specific of Iraqi music as it is the case with the local music in every single Arab country. This local dimension is of course part and parcel of the Arab musical unit and a constituent which enriches its variety and adds to it. Arab music in general and as a result of life's general requirements is oral and based on singing. The Arab musician is a singer rather than being an instrumentalist. This has been confirmed by various historical references and the present status of Arab music also testify to this fact. All the indications are that this will continue for a long time to come. There is, however, the other type of Arab music, which is based on instruments and is performed in concerts with no singing to accompany it. This type of music is also flourishing at present.

Any objective definition of Arab music should take into consideration two important facts. Firstly Arab music is performed and appreciated by the Arabs themselves in the first place. Secondly, it should consider the characteristics and specifications of Arab music in terms of rhythm, instrument, form and tone.

Arab music can therefore be defined as that type of music which has its own non-tempered tonal system through distinguished structures which form the Arabian scale.

It is also characterised by its rhythmic—temporal structures with their rich formulae performed on the goblet drum *Tabla* and frame drum *Riqq* to accompany composed forms.

The other characteristic of Arab music lies in the building structural elements of the improvised and composed music (instrumental and vocal).

Traditional musical instruments are an important part of the musical heritage of any nation. Arab music as it was mentioned earlier is divided into two types: classical and folk music. Therefore the musical instruments of each type differ from those of the other. Some of the instruments used in the Arab classical music are as follows:

String instruments such as *Ud* (lute), *Qanun* (zither), *Santur* (dulcimer), Wind instruments such as *Nay*, Percussions such as *Table* goblet drum and *Riqq* frame drum.

The musical instruments used for folk-music are: String instruments such as *Rabab*, one string fiddle.

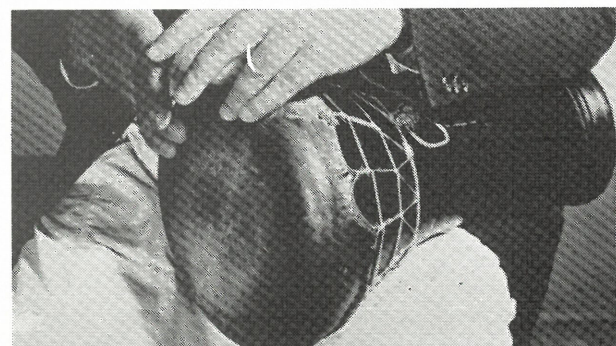


Wind instruments such as *Mitbidj*, and *Zurna*. Percussions such as *Khashabah*, *Naqqarat* and *Tabla*.

Iraqi music, as it is the case with the music of other nations, has been influenced by a number of factors. There is the authentic Iraqi music which has been in-

herited and is used up to now in modern music in various forms. There are also other types of music from other cultures such as symphonies. The Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra which was established in the 1940s plays an important role in introducing this kind of music to the Iraqi public.

Translated by Hadi Al-Taie



## The Iraqi short story

### The Artistic and Social Changes

Bassim A. Hamoudi\*

The Iraqi short story, since 1968 and up to the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war underwent broad changes whether in its details or main features. Before 1968, the structure of the story differed from one writer to another.

Abdul Rahman al-Rubaei, Musa Kraidi, Muwaffaq Khudhir, Nezar Abbas, Jelil al-Qaisi, Mahmoud Gindari, Khudhayer Abdul Emir and Abdul Sattar Nassir, for instance, were all the outcome of the 1960s which saw a change in form and context.

It was a period of conflict between Arab governments and peoples in the wake of the June 1967 war with Israel. That period was not an extension of the 1960s world trend which witnessed the students' movements in Europe.

Those writers who adopted the distortion, individuality and absurdity of the previous period, did not belong to the same generation. The 1950s trend was represented by Muwaffaq Khudhir, Nezar Abbas and others who caught up with the sixties trend. They also were affected by the alienation which prevailed in story writing in the Arab world as a means of rejection and a style in structure.

As for Al-Rubaei, Kraidi and others, their works came amid a feeling of fear aridity and individualism. They rejected those who preceded them as did John Osborne in London who considered himself an intellectual with no roots.

All these writers looked at Iraq's 1968 Revolution with admiration. A great deal of change took place in the political, social and economic infrastructures of the country. Freedom replaced oppression, revolutionary government replaced autocracy, culture of the people replaced the culture of the ruling elite in addition to economic independence which was realized after gaining control over the country's resources from world monopolies.

Some writers quickly responded to the revolutionary change as a result of their conviction in the ideology of the Revolution. Change in creative works was not an easy task. New methods were

being introduced slowly to crystallize the new social structure. However, after the 1968 Revolution, the Iraqi short story focused gradually on the social models of the new reality. It had to adhere to a new type of structure which together with the context would create a story able to convey the new message artistically and socially. The Iraqi short story is the natural outcome of social conditions and serves as a record of the social changes that took place in the country.

The writers comprehended the experiences of that period presented in stories like "Life" by Lutfiya al-Dilemi, *The Last Night Journey* by Ali Khayoon, *Blood Cannot be Removed* by Latif Nassir Hussein, and *White Carnival* by Ahmed Khalaf. Such short stories dealt with images of the new life linked with previous experiences of looting and suppression which prevailed social relations before the Revolution. Though all that was comprehended by the Iraqi writer, still there are several notes that should be mentioned such as:

1) The writers of the sixties surpassed their individuality (the above mentioned names and others) and began a new phase in their career out of their belief in their message.

2) Some writers were influenced by international and local experiences. They took an idea from other writers and reinstated it in another form. For example the Egyptian writer Sulaiman Fayadh turned Friedrich Durreumatt's play *The Old Lady's Visit* into a story entitled *Sounds*.

Lutfiya al-Dilemi used the idea of the same play in her story *Reflections on a Special Biography*. Musa Kraidi was influenced by Marguerite Duras' *Modérato Cantabel* in his story *Wandering Papers of a Short Journey*.

Meanwhile, Khudayer Abdul Emir rewrote Hasseb al-Shaik Ja'far's poem *Rain in August*, in the form of a story under the same title.

3) The insistence of some writers to present



peasants and civil servants as if they were intellectuals speaking in a cold dry way.

This study will deal with the following phenomena which characterize the Iraqi short story in the ten years that preceded the Iraq-Iran war:

1. The appearance and later disappearance of the phenomenon of storyette.

2. Abandoning colloquialism in writing in favour of standard Arabic

3. Introduction of children stories as part of general literature.

4. A return to new realism in story writing.

5. The appearance of young writers like Nejman Yassin, Sa'd al-Bazzaz, Muhsin al-Khafaji, Dhia Khudhayer and Ali Khayoon who tried to write about the Revolution and its aspirations as they were influenced by its events more than others as a result of their age.

#### 1. The appearance, popularity and weakness of storyette:

No clear reason could be pinpointed for the reappearance of this type of short stories which expressed the whole event in one sentence or two or it might cover one page at the most. Khalid Habib al-Rawi in his collection *Eyes* and Ibrahim Ahmed in *Explosions* presented examples of this type of stories.

The following are known facts:

a) The first to write such short stories in Iraq was the lawyer Nu'ail Rassam. His first storyette was published on June 16, 1930 in the *Bilad* daily and was entitled *The Death of a Poor Man*. It was followed by another entitled *Storyette*. After that no such stories were published.

b) The storyette reappeared once again in 1969 at the hands of Abdul Rahman Majeed al-Rubaie and Khalid Habib al-Rawi. Among al-Rubaie's storyettes were *The Singing Martyr* and *The Woman*. These two along with others came under one heading *Three Followers in a Wild Passage* in his collection *Other Seasons*. Khalid al-Rawi wrote *The Slide* in 1969 and published it in his collection *The Boy and Doors*. He still writes such stories up to now. Ahmad Khalaf, Ibrahim Ahmad and Hassabulla Yehya also followed the same style in writing some of their short stories.

c) As an exceptional phenomenon the storyette, was discussed extensively and credited more than it deserves. Then it was abandoned as a type of stories and writers went back to the ordinary length of the short story.

d) The press played its role in encouraging storyette writing as it covers little space when published.

e) Some writers wrote storyettes to broaden their experience and to prove that they were able to write another type of stories related in form of their

previous way of writing. Others felt it was easier to write storyettes as they were unable to go into the very details and structure of the longer short story.

f) The young writers abandoned writing storyettes as they did not consider it a special phenomenon. Therefore, it disappeared apart from the *Eyes* collection by Khalid Habib al-Rawi.

#### 2. The question of colloquialism in writing:

In an article entitled *Colloquialism in Modern Iraqi Stories* published in *Al-Adeeb al-Mu'asir* magazine No. 7 of 1974, Dr Abdul Illah Ahmad says: "The return to realism can be clearly seen in the literary works of the seventies. This is certainly related to the changes taking place in our country, therefore as realism will flourish, it is expected that colloquial dialogue in Iraqi short stories will also reappear once again."

Earlier Abdul Kadhum Issa published an article in *Al-Aqlam* magazine No. 7 of 1972, stressing the importance of writing the dialogue in colloquial Arabic. In this respect the following points are important:

a) Experimental writing which started in the sixties used standard Arabic as it is the case with other trends in writing Arab stories.

b) Stories published after the 1968 Revolution used standard Arabic because with the mother language their chances of survival are better. On the other hand colloquial Arabic has been abandoned since then although it is used occasionally by some writers.

c) The colloquialism of the forties differs from that of the fifties. And if we suppose that it continued we should have found a different kind of colloquialism. As we are discussing the beginning of another decade we see that the Iraqi story writer has made the best of standard Arabic vocabulary.

One can conclude that colloquialism does not mean a return to realism. Because present day story writers are not in need of such a language.

#### 3. The appearance of children's stories:

One of the fruits of the July 17, 1968 Revolution was the launching of the two magazines *Majallati* and *Al-Mizmar* for children and they were considered models of successful press for children. Later on they were followed by *Al-Maseera*, *Ala' al-Deen*, *Talayi* Stories and *Mektebat At-Tifl*. The children's press sought the help of prominent story writers to write scenarios and stories directed to children. Among them one can mention Khudhayer Abdul Emir, Abdul Rahman Majeed, Khalid Habib, Dr Adnan Ra'oof, Abdul Razzaq al-Mutalibil, Abdul Sattar Nassir and Abid Awn al-Rudhan.

Later on a new generation of writers specializing in children's literature emerged. Among them were

Sami al-Zubaidi, Farooq Sallum, Abdul Illah Ra'oof, Salah Mohammad Ali, Ja'far Sadiq Mohammad, Kadhum Salih, Asma' Abdul Hameed and Hussam Hammudi al-Samuk. Because each writer dealt with the mythical event in a different way and short stories were turned into scenarios by other than those who wrote them, a new style of story writing appeared.

#### 4. The return of realism:

The return to realism can be attributed to the new social conditions. The revolutionary authority put an end to the vagueness of the political atmosphere. Freedom is for the masses and for every person putting his potentials at the service of the Revolution.

The writer found a new reality to depict without being ordered to do so. This feeling sprung from his sincere citizenship. Being an innovative person he was able to picture reality as the nations consciousness. But each writer remains independent to depict this reality from his own point of view.

Adil Abdul Jabbar wrote *The Memory of Fingers and One, Two, Three*. Abdul Rahman al-Rubaie wrote *Children are Playing*. *The Master of Time and Arab Concerns*.

Al-Rubaie pinpointed some of the drawbacks of the short stories in a lecture he gave in Tunis at a gathering on Arab story, "Poetry has affected story writing so seriously that Arab story has lost its characteristics. Even its heroes acquired poetic presence and lost their outstanding features."

This is a subjective view. A story can be nothing but a story independent of any other form of literature and as clear as poetry or drama. But if techniques from other forms were borrowed then it should be for the purpose of clarification only. Al-Rubaie used poetic prose in his stories with no justification. In *Al-Mada* for example, we do not find a sign of originality in what Al-Rubaie did, he also was not able to convey to the reader the social message he intended to make them understand an event taken from history.

However, Al-Rubaie remains one of the innovative Arab story writers who always comes out with something new.

Lutfiya al-Dilemi in some of her works stresses on selecting ideas from our heritage. Her short stories *Witnesses and Martyrs*, *The Cry* and "Arab Face" samples of her provocative stories that rely on the Arab Revolution as a source, while her story "Umran and the Summer" is an example of the symbolic revolutionary story which does not specify a certain place or reality but a revolutionary ambition to carry a weapon and fight for the homeland. The same applies to her story *The Kite*.

Al-Dilemi in an experiment of hers entitled *Seasons for Water* says, "My apologies to the poem,

story, diary and other names. I have not written under any of these titles. I drew on paper what came to my mind like tiny drops of rain in the field of my soul. This is what the muse made me write."

Her experiment is a song for her country and about the uniqueness of her love for Iraq. It is also a mixture of heritage-inspired dialogues between the writer and her soul but said by other characters. In the 1960s, the writer would have said with no hesitation that this attempt was a story. Therefore she preceded the experiment with an introduction so it would not be taken for a story. This is part of the awareness the Iraqi story writer has reached in preplanning under what heading his work will be classified bearing in mind the progress Iraqi stories have achieved in form.

Dr. Adnan Ra'oof who was clearly an existentialist in his first collection *The Second Person*, published in the 1960s, seems as if he has become another writer when he wrote *The Great Gate* which is clearly full of Arab worries. The hero is an Arab who is let down by his country. He feels strange and lonely. Later he becomes paralysed but he is aware of what is happening around him. He contemplates on doctors' decision about his case then decides to leave the European hospital in which he was being treated. Was that a form of rejection or was it a type of confrontation with the European umbrella extended over Arab paralysis?

All the suggestions are positive, whether the story followed a traditional realistic line or not.

Adnan Ra'oof with all his ability seen in *The Second Person* has exceeded himself to what is better. His hero rejects his reality therefore he confidently challenges it by leaving the hospital and Europe realizing that his salvation lies in his country.

Ra'oof's recent collection *The Tall Man's Thoughts* is a trial of the following idea. Can Yousif, the hero in the first story break through the European taboo and become a monk in a monastery despite the fact that he is an Arab from the Orient. The monastery here is not an ordinary one and the nearby forest is not a real one. But they symbolize a pure European oasis. It is another desert with its trees and wolves but the soil is pure. It is a long path between European and Arab symbols and Yousif gets used to them while preparing to become a monk. But he cannot continue and leaves the monastery and finds the key others have lost. After he fails to enter Europe through its spiritual gate he tries again but this time with its civilised and material aspect in mind. He goes to ask about a girl but an old woman slams the door in his face he feels as if he is going to explode. So he decides to go back home. Ra'oof reshapes his characters after having been caught up between two contemporary civilisations.

Ahmad Khalaf deals cautiously and sadly with reality. He does not picture it as it is, but portrays it.





He admitted in a lecture he gave entitled *The Short Story and Problems of Story Criticism in Iraq*, that stories of the 1960s were rejected by the reader because of a gap between the reader and the writer, a gap which critics exaggerated.

He rejects classifying stories according to schools. The contemporary story cannot be surrealist, existentialist, documentary or even realist as it is still in its experimental phase.

Before that Ahmad Kalaf in his collection *A Walk in Deserted Streets* attempted to focus on the everyday events of life which is full of social suggestion... his characters were simple but anarchists and rejectionists. The Arab-Israeli war of June 1967 and freedom fighting were the main theme of many of his stories.

Ahmad Khalaf makes use of the aesthetics of place. In his story *The Lonely Day* the father lives on the ground floor of the house while his son occupies a room on the first floor. The ground floor is the route to the outside world and the son is not able to make contact with the world as his father controls the ground floor so he only sees the world through a small window in his room.

The girl in this story as a confident optimistic bourgeoisie represents another type of oppression for him, he wants to revolt but he can't until he finds out his mother's past and goes out to the street looking for a remote goal, not his father, not his mother and not even his girl. At the station an old man advises him to travel. It is not important whether he accepts the advice or not, the important thing is that he overcomes his situation to a new reality of which travelling is only one aspect.

Mahmoud Gindari presents something close to that but with different details in his story *It happened in the Year of Elephant*. The woman in his stories is a live and present symbol. He submits a challenging case with a vague language. The writer takes real images from life but his original prints are obvious.

In this story there is a stress on sex. The father emigrates to Al-Hujaz. He was a military man and had contacts with the British Army. While there he had an affair with a sterile woman who desperately wanted a child. His son Sa'd visits him there. The son is approached by the owner of the hotel Haj Masood who is a homosexual. He reports the man to the police, but later he realizes that such practices are commonplace in men's society and that the city is full with unfamiliar values. The most painful shock comes when Sa'd discovers his father's sterility through his mistress.

At the end Sa'd manages to give the woman a child but he feels lost because his father's past. What does all this mean? What does the *Year of Elephant* mean in particular? Does the writer want to say that the youth are more capable of correcting and that the past generations are sterile and phony? Then

what is the meaning of a corrupt woman living in the same city where Sa'd and his father are staying?

This story is not of an experimental structure. It is rather an accumulation of previous experiences. It is about the obscurity of human relations.

The late story writer Muwaffaq Khudhir had an absolute belief in the model Arab hero, the young hero who within himself leads a campaign of change in the story *The Star*. The story submits clearly the case of two daring political figures. They share a common background as activists in the Arab Revolutionary Movement. One of them decides to continue with the Movement and takes part in the change carried out by the Revolution. The other is an introverted man, who lives in his own world because of a personal tragic event. The first man visits the second. As he becomes aware of his friends' problems he advises him to become engaged in life once again. But he finds that his child's paralysis has got into him. So he leaves him wishing him and his child all the best.

Muwaffaq's main character not only calls for participation in the revolution but in *Bright Day*, *The Song of Trees*, and *The Banner* he is a clear and committed person. In *The Banner*, the masses celebrate one of the victorious moments of the revolution with no fear of opposition forces or counter-revolutionaries.

Muwaffaq Khudhir's works are consistent with the principles of the good. His language is clear and rich and there is no sign of the darkness that preceded the July morning in his works.

Musa Kraidi's works remain controversial. His long story *Lost Papers of a Short Journey* published in 1974 portrays the case of a young city dweller and bears the grievances of an intellectual who deals with people cautiously. He is also a writer preoccupied with his personal social case with Summya, a female colleague. They both share the white collar worker's dreams.

Summya fulfills a constant dream by resorting to travel as a means of escape. He wants to write about the October War between Egypt, Syria and Israel but is unable to do so whether sober or drunk. The writer in this story wants to picture the case of a special type of intellectuals who would like to be in harmony with the movement of society but are unable to. In *The Horse* and *Movement in the Spector of Death* he presents different cases of people deeply involved in the social movement.

Khudhayer Abdul Emir's stories are full of simple people who are familiar with reality. It also makes use of heritage in pairing the revolutionary present with the past.

Abdul Razzaq al-Mutalibi has an ability of sorting out examples of people and selecting what he wants. In his stories *Men Travel* and *Alexander in the Walls of Fire* he tackles the case of sacrificing ones' self for



freedom. In *All the Sunny Nights* he gives an account of the rise of the new world as a technical and objective equipment of two worlds. The first collapses completely and the second begins within the world of machine ownership, an arrogant ownership which was prompted by reactionary forces. Then came the Revolution to give the village a new reality and new human relations. The Revolution also came to put an end to the two previous worlds namely, the old and the new feudal worlds.

In *The Sparrow and the River* he pictures the experiment of collective farms which is an example of new Revolutionary practices. Such practices are also portrayed in *Entering the Summer of Happiness* by Belqiss Ni'ma al-Aziz and *June* by Yousif Ya'qoub Haddad. The subject of both stories is nationalisation. In *June*, it is presented in a direct way where the conflict between the worker and the British director of the oil company becomes tense in the wake of the negotiations. Belqiss presents the theme through the practices of a young paraffin seller in his popular neighbourhood.

In *A Voice Deep in Waiting* Belqiss abandons her experimentalism and presents the model of a revolutionary who was detained and tortured before the Revolution. He was also expelled from university. When the Revolution took place he joined it from the very beginning.

It is not possible to list all the stories written by the writers of the two periods and it is not our intention to review all the stories written by the writers concerned like A'ed Khusbak, Mohammad Khudhayer, Fadhil al-Rubaie, Najib al-Ma'moori, Jihad Majeed and others. It suffices to say that the picture of disintegration prevailing in the previous periods has ended. During the first ten years of the Revolution new social relations were established. We cannot say that they are final but they are a practical expression of the overall changes that grow within a society. These changes have positive returns. Therefore the Iraqi writer has shifted from picturing his own inner sufferings through the problems of the Arab Nation as a whole and not his own small country.

For example in *The Gulf Bird* by Kadhum al-Ahmedi we find the main character Karim al-Marzouq and his bird symbolize the unity of nation and his readiness to give anything in the interest of its present and future. In another story *Because They Are Poor Their Dreams Are Legitimate* Zehroon, the new born baby represents the father and the future who enter cities on a white horse reshaping both the present and the future. Zehroon clearly symbolizes the Arab Revolution and the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party.

Some writers despite their high ability are imprisoned within the images they present. They tend to give them unjustified dimensions. For example

Abdul Illah Abdul Razzaq in his short collection *Ophelia has the Body of the Earth* is a highly innovative short story writer. But in some stories he seems to be lost in the details of the event he creates. In *Falls of Sand* he draws a slow image of an old man who wants to bury his dog but when finishes digging a hole he falls in it and his dog starts throwing sand over him. We wonder why would a writer use such damaging images that mean nothing. It could be a desire for going beyond the familiar. In *Sweet Summer Rain* he aborts a plan he drew up for a freedom fighter.

Why should he make his hero suffer by crossing barbed wires to bring a body? The new magical situation of migrating birds drawn for the hero attracts his eyes. The writer keeps adding to it without exploiting his astonishing ability of story telling. However, Abdul Illah is a rich writer, he is capable of giving and conveying. His wonderful humanitarian story *The Bridge* bears witness to that. He is also one of the promising Iraqi short story writers.

Finally we have Ghazi al-Abadi among the story writers of the period. He wrote *Smiles for the People and the Wind* after he abandoned his previous experiences and started a new phase in his career. Later on he wrote *From Calmness to Silence* which is regarded a document of Arab struggle because it pictures Arab worries and the details of what is going on in Lebanon.

Before dealing with the stories written by the younger generation of story writers, we would like to refer to two stories written by one of the pioneers of the modern Iraqi story. He is Fu'ad al-Tekerli. As far as we know he has published only two short stories during the past ten years. The first was *Tenoor* (Oven made of clay). The second is *Sympathy* which was published in *Al-Jumhuriya* daily on March 20, 1972. In *Sympathy* he pictures a group of frivolous youth busy with their own personal problems and far from the tense political atmosphere in the Sudan at the time.

It shows them when they get into their car after a party and follow another car boarded by some men. The men stop their car, get out to beat the youth. They all run away except Ra'd who gets a good beating.

This gloomy picture of youth is presented against a background of the words of the song *Sympathy* and the colloquial dialogue and Tekerli's distinguished style. But is it a form of rejection by a person in his fifties of the practices of a group of youth which might seem ordinary to others. Or is it a condemnation of one generation by another? It might be so. However, each generation has its own idealistic views and aspirations.

## 5. The new generation:

At the beginning of this study we referred to the appearance of a group of young writers who witnessed the Revolution. We also mentioned that some of them lack the ability of using the language soundly. However, the atmosphere was encouraging and they found the opportunity to publish their works. It also should be noted that some young writers started even before the Revolution but they rarely had the chance to publish any of their works.

Abid Awn al-Rodhan wrote stories before the Revolution but they were published after it. In an article published in *Al-Aqlam* magazine in July 1978 he said that it was only during the 1970s when he was able to rid himself of the structure and form of the 1960s story. He started publishing his stories in *Mejellati* children's magazine with no clear aim but became known with his story *Hanefi's Sorrows at the Km.101*. He pictures the worries of an Arab soldier who finds out the game, and starts laughing so loud that his laughter is heard all over the Arab world. Here the ironic laugh means rejection.

Abid Awn in his three stories *The Other Face of Death*, *Death at Another Time* and *The Return of the Migrating Birds*, tries to picture a group of people represented in Hassan al-Hamoud. They all migrated from their villages to the city because of the feudal oppression. And those who remained were subjected to indignation and false democracy which in the end made them migrate too. After the Revolution Hassan returns to his village like a bird returning home. To him land is life, fertility and the symbol of his existence.

Al-Rodhan's stories are not that simple. They express his principles and write them carefully. He is also aware of what he is writing. His ability in writing is clearly noticed in *The Pomegranate Tree* which is one of his good stories. It is about a man who believes in his country and people.

A writer like Latif Nassir Hussein is interested in unique popular examples of society, i.e., the sophisticated gypsy atmosphere in *An uninteresting end of a man in search of a beginning*, and in *Anger* when Sa'id, a handicapped man is unable to get the girl whom he wants. Hussein conveys carefully and patiently the anxieties of the new construction era. In his story *Birth* he gives an example of a soldier fighting for his country.

*Two Faces* is about a martyr's brother, *Blood Cannot be Removed* is a confrontation between the good and the evil, *The Crossing* is an example of a certain period of the secret struggle of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party before the Revolution.

Hassan Ahmad al-Ani in *The Tale of the Second Journey* intertwines a special position of a person towards himself and his position towards the abortive 14th Ramadhan Revolution (February 8, 1963).

The main character in the story tells his comrade, "You are being pompous, you reject the accusation of failure and refuse to join the Revolution." He also says to him, "We went to prison, we were chased and tortured together, but we defied them, we did not say a word. But the failure of the experiment with all its glory made the whole world collapse before us." The dilemma of the main character and his friend begins when they try to comprehend the dimensions of the second Revolution, i.e. 17th July, 1968 Revolution. I will not talk about the details of the relations with the woman as she is only an introduction to a general relation and that is the person and his country.

Although they are older than the young generation of writers, Abid Awn al-Rodhan, Latif Nassir Hussein and Hassan al-Ani became known as writers only after the Revolution.

Among the most prominent of all young writers is Nejman Yassin. He makes use of heritage, following the works of Al-Delaimi from Iraq and Al-Gitani and Tamir from other Arab countries.

*The Man* by Nejman published in 1977 *Hurras Al-Watan* magazine depicts a Ba'athist who went through a hard time in detention but faced it courageously because of his firm beliefs. Nejman is no different from his other contemporaries but as we previously said he is still obsessed by the story structure of the previous period. In that he is similar to Sa'd al-Bazzaz. Al-Bazzaz in his story *Revisions* was clearly obsessed with the 1960s style. The main character stays lonely at New Year's Eve thinking of his beloved one and of the world during the Black September events. At the end of the story he walks hand in hand with his beloved in the rain which is a symbol of purity.

Al-Bazzaz abandons this formal experiment in his second collection *The Search for Sea Birds* in which Arab worries are depicted clearly. *The Ball and the Mind* shows the people busy with sports as an objective alternative for the political vacuum in a certain Arab country. The story is supplemented with a report that adds nothing to it. It is also a report-like story. In *The Exit from Sea* Al-Bazzaz pictures a Palestinian leaving the sea to look for the sea birds that left before him. He also tells of the Palestinians experiencing exile at home.

Amjad Tawfiq focuses on humanity in *The Sword and the Visitor* by using a child as a symbol of innocence and purity to give the story's objective value more vigour. Childhood is often found in Tawfiq's other stories such as *A Handful of Ice* and *A New Melody for an Old Song*. Childhood might sometimes express a case of aloofness from reality. He also pictures images from everyday life as a means of disguising this aloofness. *The Death of the Small Birds' Seller* is a clear indication of rejecting reality.





Amjad Tawfiq has written realistic stories that include the smallest details. When you read his stories you can tell he knows what he wants to say and there is no place for rhetoric in his stories.

Tawfiq's collections *Ice... Ice* and *The White Mountain* have a similar theme. Though they assert his ability, they are also a negative sign which not only Tawfiq suffers from but so do Abid Awn Al-Roudhan and Ghazi al-Abadi in few of their stories. That sort of stories should have been turned into novels so that the writers would have been fully free to enrich the atmosphere and events of the story. And if his two stories *The Coming Ice Stars* and *Rainbow for All* formulate reality in a new way. *The Carriage* is outstanding for its attractiveness which shows the ability of its writer to build upon the details of history. It links these details with myths in order to achieve the story's objective in picturing the Arab nation's hard journey throughout history.

The young story writer Ali Khayoon who does not deceive himself by using experiences far from reality presents images of those who struggled for achieving a bright future. His outstanding stories are *The Reading of Dawn's Paper*, *Comrades* and *Leaflets are no Longer Confidential*. In these stories he depicts the sufferings of people before the Revolution and their condition after it.

Ali Khayoon adopts a clear vision when dealing with reality. His sentences are carefully structured.

Through this study we dealt with many story writers, their works and styles to show the originality of the Iraqi story writer and how deeply he is linked with the questions of his country. The war time experience has added more innovation which at the beginning was still not clear but has matured recently.

*Translated by Ranin Khalid Saeed*

\* Born in Baghdad in 1937, he worked as teacher of History, headmaster of a secondary school, head of the Cultural Department at the Sawt al-Jamaheer Radio Station and Editorial Secretary of Al-Wadi, Al-Masira, Al-Aqlam magazines and Al-Mizmar and Majallati children's magazines.

\* At present he is the Editor-in-Chief of *Al-Turath al-Sha'bi* (Folklore) magazine.

\* His first book on literary criticism was published in 1961 entitled *On Iraqi Short Stories*. The second entitled *The Third Face of a Woman* was published in 1973. The third was published in 1980 and it is entitled *A View of the Iraqi Short Story*. The fourth book was published in 1982. It is a war story entitled *Fire and Olives*.

\* At present he has several books being published such as *The Critic and the War Story*, *The Iraqi Folk Tale* written jointly with Yassin al-Nassir and Salah al-Ansari, *Iraqi Short Stories* also written jointly with Dr Dawood Sallum.



## The Baghdad International Art Festival



*Art for Humanity was the theme, and Saddam Centre for Arts the venue of Baghdad International Art Festival (October 26-November 1, 1986)*

Art for Humanity was the theme of the Baghdad International Art Festival held under the auspices of President Saddam Hussein. The Festival which started on the 26th of October until the 1st of November, included art exhibitions, lectures, open discussions as well as visiting historical sites such as Babylon, Samarra, Karbala and Ctesiphon.

Initially, when the idea of holding an international festival was finally approved, a high committee was assigned presided by the Minister of Information and Culture. Members of the committee were delegated to Arab, Asian, European and Latin American countries to personally extend invitations to the selected artists and art critics who enjoy a reputable name in the art world.

The regulations set for the participants in the international exhibition included an item stating that fifteen awards would be granted to the competing artists. The prizes were categorized as: Saddam's Grand Award of 30,000 US dollars; four first awards of 15,000 US dollars each and ten merit awards of 5,000 US dollars each. The regulations also stipulated

that only paintings and sculptures would be accepted in the exhibition; measurements for both sculpture and painting as well as the number of entries were also limited.

On this occasion, it was decided to invite members of the International Association of Art (IAA) and the International Association of Art Critics (IAAC) to meet in Baghdad while attending the international art exhibition. More than 250 delegates from different parts of the world were present during the week of the Festival including artists, art critics and journalists.

Perhaps this is the first time an international art festival including a major exhibition is organised by one country which undertakes all the arrangements of transporting art works, bearing the whole expenses and hosting the participants. Needless to say that such a major activity coincided with the critical conditions through which this country, Iraq, is undergoing. Yet the Festival brought new life, created enthusiasm and reinforced the sense of defiance. This was obvious in the art works produced by the Iraqi artists.



The international art exhibition was the most important event in the festival. It included more than 650 paintings, prints and sculptures by nearly 230 artists representing 50 countries. Pavilions were arranged in an order that allowed the exhibits to be as clearly recognised as possible. Yet some of the pavilions were inconveniently displayed due to late arrival.

Among the prominent names that took part in the exhibition were Kenneth Armittage from Britain, who personally attended the festival accompanied by two well-known print makers Bartolomeo Dos Santos and Tom Phillips. Eduardo Paoloszi also took part with two sculptures and two prints though he did not come. From Italy names like Attardi, Fazzini and Monenarini with other ten artists took part. From India the famous sculptor Senkho Chaudri came accompanied by five Indian artists. From France ten artists took part, some of them attended personally; among them was Baron Renouard, Jean Pierre Verdeille and Carzou.

Though the international exhibition included high quality art works, and though such works showed the current artistic trends, there were certain drawbacks. Neither West German art nor American or even Japanese art were represented. Second the large number of works resulted in a sort of tightness as far the exhibits were concerned. Third, no experimental work in the nature like those one usually see in other similar international exhibitions was presented in this show. This may be due to the fact that measures of works were previously limited.

The nine-member jury who were selected by the High Committee to nominate the awards included Sankho Chaudri (India), Jose Ion (Spain), Claude

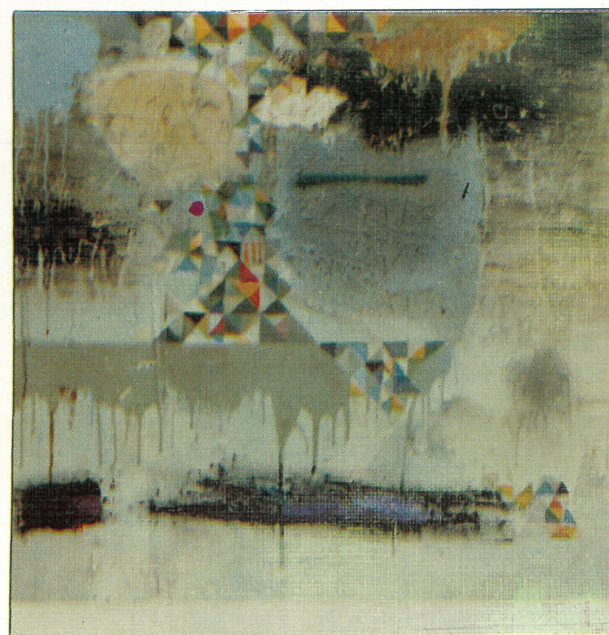
Blenie (France), David Ecker (USA), Barco Laöziski (Yugoslavia), Jack Morris (Belgium), Ahmed Nawar (Egypt) and two Iraqi members, Wijdan Mahir (architect) and Yusuf al-Saiegh (poet and critic). The awards were given equally to six winners.

The Saddam Grand Prize of 30,000 US dollars was split by the Jury into two equal shares. There was also four 15,000 US dollars prizes. These awards were given to: Ali Talib, Shakir Hassan and Rafa Nassiri (Iraq), Rashid al-Karaichi (Algeria), Yousif Ahmed (Qatar) and Naja Mehdawi (Tunisia). The ten Merit awards were given to: Mnrul Islam (Bangladesh), Saleh Ridha (Egypt), David Almeida (Portugal), Jackiewics Wzadyslaw (Poland), Alan Cosio (Philippines), Sonsak Chowtapapong (Thailand), Fredrico Gismondi (Italy), Ching Kyung Yovis (South Korea), Krishen Khana (India) and Manslo Valdes (Spain).

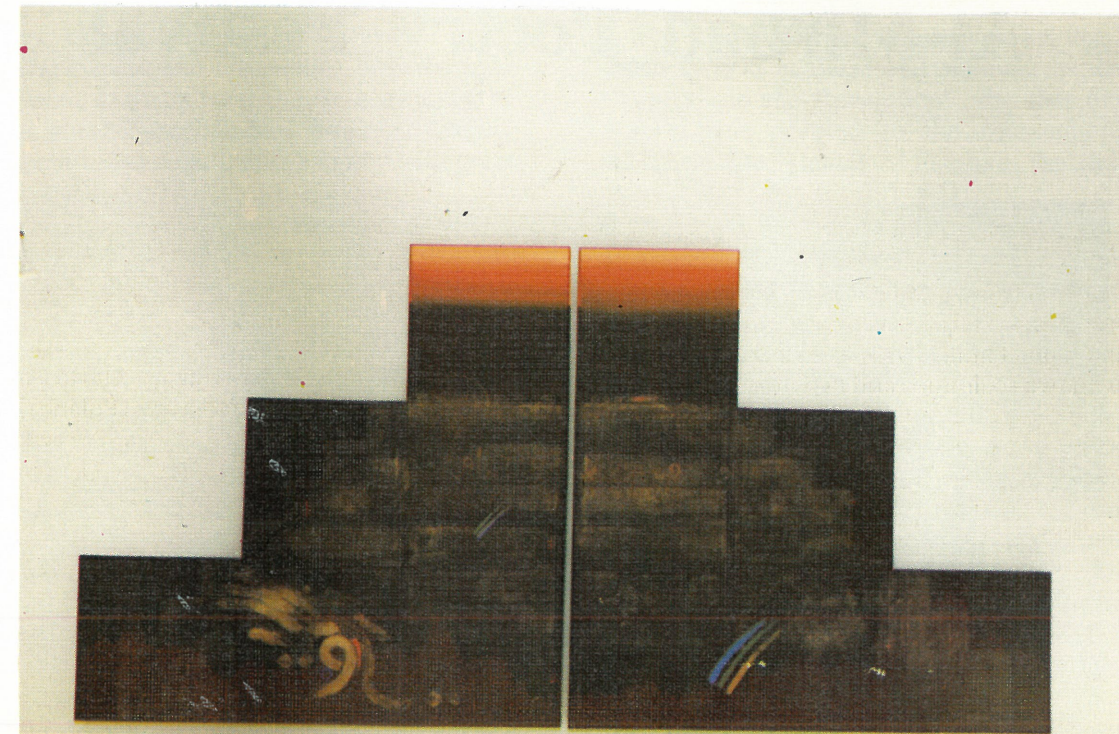
In addition to the international exhibition four other shows were held: the contemporary Iraqi ceramic exhibition at Baghdad Gallery, the calligraphy exhibition at Al-Riwaq and the Iraqi contemporary exhibition (the permanent collection) at the National Museum of Modern Art.

On the second floor, at Saddam Art Centre more than one hundred Iraqi artists showed their very recent works.

Simultaneously meetings of both the IAA and IAAC took place at Mansour Melia Hotel. The IAA's executive committee's meetings had their new elections where Mr Ismail al-Shaikhly (Iraq) was elected president. The IAAC members also held an open discussion on the Festival's theme Art for Humanity.



Two paintings from the Baghdad International Art Festival by Shakir Hassan Al-Saeed (left) and Ali Talib (right)



The "Ziggurats" by Rafa Al-Nasiri won one of the first prizes at the Baghdad International Art Festival



More than 650 works by 230 artists from all over the world took part in the Baghdad International Art Festival



## Al-Mirbad Poetry Festival



*Large number of poets from many parts of the world took part in last year's Mirbad Festival*

In a short speech concluding the activities of the 6th Mirbad Poetry Festival (Baghdad November 26-December 3, 1985), Minister of Information and Culture Mr Latif Nsayyif Jassim invited all participants, over a thousand poets, critics, writers, academicians and scholars from Iraq and all over the world, to attend this year's festival. However, this is not the whole story of this festival which has become, especially during the last few years, a landmark in modern Iraq's cultural activities.

There are, for example, many other people invited to this year's festival. Two poets from every Socialist country are invited. A large number of Orientalists and Arabists are again taking part in the festival. Besides, Iraqi dailies are giving intensive coverage of the festival in literary pages and special supplements. The festival's daily, for the first time will be published in sixteen pages thus documenting almost every single activity and throwing light on most of the participants by publishing short interviews with them. The most outstanding aspect of the festival is perhaps the allocation of a separate TV channel and a separate radio station to cover as many activities as possible.

The Festival's secretariat is publishing various books on the history of the Mirbad, a book on the cultural offices and departments in Iraq, the cultural achievements throughout the country and authors and poets index. On the fringe, special and distinguished book exhibitions, art exhibitions and fashion shows are held. A few plays, feature films and concerts are also included in the festival's programme. The Iraqi National Dancing Troupe entertains the participants by presenting a number of its skilful and excellent shows of folk dances.

Content wise, this year's festival, apart from poetry reading sessions, seems to place much emphasis on poetry criticism sessions. These sessions fall into six major categories with various research papers discussing every one of them. They are:

1. The making of Arab culture (poetry and culture).
2. Poetry and the challenges facing the national thought (war poetry and resistance poetry).
3. Poetry and arts.
4. Poetry in the age of science.
5. Poetry translation.
6. The national character of contemporary Arabic poetry.

Over thirty literary critics and academicians are submitting their research papers on these topics with many more taking part in the discussion which follows. The papers and discussions bring to light various issues that worry Iraqi and Arab critics at the time when many European and American literary theories seem to be copied and adopted in a great deal of modern Arabic literary criticism.

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The first Mirbad Poetry Festival was held in Basra on April 1, 1971 and was attended by some 250 Iraqi and Arab poets, scholars and critics. One poet, Sharif Al-Ra's read during that festival a poem by starting from the end, a matter enough to cause a great deal of surprise among the audience. Some thought that Al-Ra's wanted to puzzle his audience by his abstraction.

During the first festival, Iraqi short story writer Ghazi Al-Abadi suggested in an article (Ath-Thawra daily, April 16, 1971) that in addition to poetry reading sessions, a number of Iraqi academicians ought to be commissioned to write research papers on the various activities of Al-Mirbad throughout history.

He even went on to say that critics should draw a comparison between these activities and any other similar ones abroad.

Al-Abadi was probably right in his claim since there were poor sessions and shallow discussions of the festival poetry at the time. Moreover, the

Festival journal "Al Mirbad" provided poor quality writings.

The second Mirbad Poetry Festival was held on April 1, 1972 in Basra and although its theme was "Poetry and the Revolution", the first day of the festival was devoted to the commemoration of Al-Khalil Bin Ahmed Al-Farahidi, the well-known Arab philologist (d. 791 AD).

As it was the case with the first festival, there were poetry reading sessions and criticism sessions. Dr Michelle Sulayman suggested that in order that Al-Mirbad fulfils its aims, two points should be taken into account. Firstly, representatives of modern poetry from Arab countries should be invited so as they might present samples of their works. Secondly, every Mirbad Festival should deal with the poetry and art of one Arab country.

Well-known Arab poets and critics attended the second festival like Mahmoud Darweesh, Nizar Qabbani, Ahmed Abdul Mu'ti Hijazi, Dr Suhail Idris, the late Dr Khalil Hawi, Mohammed Afifi Mutar and Abdul Qadir Al-Qit.

The Third Festival was held on April 1-6, 1974 in Basra and its theme was "Man of letters and the Revolutionary Victories". During the festival, one criticism session was devoted to the commemoration of old Arab grammarian Sibawai, while other two sessions dealt with the criticism of poems read during the festival.

The huge number of poets and critics (over 240) who participated in the festival could not, however, lift the festival from its deadlock. The random



*Palestinian poet Mahmoud Derwish reciting a poem during a previous Mirbad Festival*



selection of poems almost rid the festival of its identity as a place in which modern trends in Arabic poetry are presented in such a big literary gathering.

Iraqi poet Yassin T. Hafidh who was among the participants said that most of the festival's poems were old fashioned from the artistic point of view, thus the weakness of the festival.

The poet attributed this to the difference in the quality of poets represented in the festival.

"It is unreasonable if you bring together two poets, the first one modern while the second one has no idea whatsoever about the essence of poetry".

Lebanese writer Dr. Suhail Idris lashed his severe criticism on a poem by Nazik Al-Malaika read in the festival. "It is an extravaganza which lacks two essential elements necessary to modern poetry: profundity of content and the transparent ambiguity which characterized Al-Malaika's poetry.

In 1977, the fourth Al-Mirbad Poetry Festival was held in Baghdad whereas the Fifth festival was held back again in Basra in 1983.

The Arabs, in the olden times, were accustomed to hold in their markets and pavilions various literary gatherings for congratulations, callings out to go to war and commemorative celebrations. Also they had gatherings for poetry reading, exchanging the latest news and discussing their affairs. Nadi Quriash (Quraish Club) and Dar Al-Nadwa (House of Representatives) were only two examples of such gatherings.

If a poet emerged from a certain tribe, the girls would go out dancing, playing music and singing to the honour of the Arabs and their generosity. Most certainly, it was Ukad Suq, a place full of palm trees in the valley between Mecca and Al-Taif, that became the Arabs major literary festival in 540 AD.

At the beginning of Islam, another festive place flourished. This time, it was Al-Mirbad Suq in Basra, Iraq, that became a crucible for pre-Islamic traditions and Islamic glories.

In Al-Mirbad, a kaleidoscope of literature, trade, war and politics met. It was also a platform for those who sought fame. Also, it was a place for a kind of an Arab news agency, an object for complaint, a platform for boastings and help, an area of conflict, a rendez-vous for peace, a field for heroism, lovers corner and a rostrum for political parties.

Al-Mirbad did not only restore the characteristics of the older Arab markets but also recorded the new changes within the Arab societies. That was probably the reason for its survival throughout the years

and its importance as well.

The place affirmed its existence even before Utba Bin Ghazwan started to implement the plan Caliph Omar Bin Al-Khattab had drawn for the city of Basra in the year 14 of the Hijra. Al-Mirbad existed before Islam but was not well-known since it was hardly mentioned in Pre-Islamic tradition. When Iraq embraced Islam and Basra emerged as an important city in the country, Al-Mirbad turned into one of the busiest places on the city's Western side. It also became a resting place for the desert caravans before they headed to Basra or returned back home. That could be explained by various development and construction projects in the areas. Many 'Walis' (mayors) and dignitaries had their own house in Al-Mirbad, a sign that may tell the status of the poet, his works and fame. Visitors and families who came from distant areas used to stay in certain places similar to the present hotels, and pensions.

Al-Mirbad seemed to gain its fame from one important factor: freedom of speech and expression. Accordingly, there was no superiority of a famous person or poet over a less known or even unknown one. If a person wanted to challenge his antagonist he would simply say to him, "We'll meet tomorrow at Al-Mirbad". Those were exactly the words of Bashar Ibn Burd to one of Bani Zayd's people.

Apart from freedom of speech and expression, order and security marked almost every Mirbad season.

During the Abassid rule, Al-Mirbad became mecca not only for Arab poets, but also for philologists, linguists and grammarians. Certain sessions on desinential inflection, grammar and poetry refinement held to provide the participants with in-depth knowledge.

In the seventh century of the Hijra, Al-Mirbad started to decline and its survival became suspicious. Historian Yaqout Al-Hamawi (d. 620 Hijra) wrote that Abu Al-Qassim Nasr Bin Ahmed Al-Himyari came to see Abu Al-Hussain Bin Muthana when the last fire brought down the entire market place of Al-Mirbad. Understandably, there seemed to have been several fires at various times in Al-Mirbad. Al-Hamawi asserted the total destruction of Al-Mirbad when he wrote: "Al-Mirbad is now three miles away from Basra. The area between the two places was densely populated but now turned into a wasteland, therefore, Al-Mirbad has now become like a lonely town in the wilderness."



## Art Exhibitions

Summertime this year was teeming with art activities. Various art exhibitions were held by the Art Department at the Ministry of Information and Culture to display artists' paintings, sculptures, graphic arts, ceramics and posters at various galleries in Baghdad.

In July, many exhibitions were held to observe the 18th anniversary of July 17, 1968 Revolution. A major art exhibition was organised at Al-Riwaq Gallery in Baghdad on this occasion. Some 30 modern Iraqi artists representing different schools of art displayed their works. Among them were leading artists such as Dr Ala' Bashir, Mohammed Mahr-eldin and Isma'il Fattah al-Turk. Their works which dealt with a variety of social themes showed how the art movement had flourished under the Revolution.

Between June 28 and July 17 Ayad al-Husseini, a promising young calligrapher displayed pieces of calligraphy showing his skill as master in this field. Most of his works included scripts of verses of the Holy Quran. Other modern works depicted the horizon and the square.

The grounds of Baghdad International Fair were the venue of Third Tammuz Photography Exhibition between July 16-24. The photographs put on show by various departments reflected the progress achieved in the country in all fields under the July 17, 1968 Revolution.

A collection of Iraqi works of art were displayed

at an exhibition held at the Grand Palace in France under the theme *Comparison*. Works of artists from different parts of the world and from a number of Arab countries were also put on show. Iraqi artists whose works were displayed were Rafa' al-Nasiri, Dhia al-Azzawi, Salih al-Jumei'i, Shafiq al-Nawab, Ardash Kakavian, Shakir Hassan al-Sa'id, Ali Talib, Kadhum Haider and Su'ad al-Attar.

On July 17, graphic works by 88 artists belonging to different parts of the Third World were re-exhibited at the Baghdad Gallery in Haifa Street. The most interesting quality of the pieces was the individuality that characterized each group of works. Among the Arab artists taking part in the exhibition were Omar Khalil (Sudan) and Mohammed al-Rawas (Lebanon).

A large collection of inscriptions, manuscripts and newly-found antiquities and treasures were put on display on July 20 at an exhibition held by the Antiquities and Heritage Authority at the Iraqi Museum. On display were also samples of Kufic calligraphic script on paper and parchment dating back to the first century of Hijra. Other exhibits included antiquities discovered at the sites of two basins of Al-Qadisiya Dam in Haditha, north-west of Baghdad, and Saddam Dam in Mosul.

At the National Museum of Modern Art a number of soldiers exhibited their works on August 4. Some one hundred pieces of art were put on display. Their

\* Historical information about Al-Mirbad are based on an Arabic pamphlet "Ayyam fil Mirbad" by Abdul Hameed Al-Alwaji, 1985.





*A painting by Salih Al-Jumai' from an art exhibition*

works depicted the role of President Saddam Hussein in steering the battle and the feats of Iraqi soldiers in defending their country against Iranian aggression. Such exhibitions are usually organised during national occasions.



*A photograph by Abdulla Hassoon from a photography exhibition*

The first photography exhibition was organised by the photographers' committee, at the Iraqi Journalists Union. Jassim al-Zubeidi, Abdulla Hassoon, Fuad Shakir and other members of the Committee put their works on show. The photographs dealt with a variety of themes on landscape and people.

For ten days in mid-August, a number of paintings portraying life, peace and war by young artist Sabti al-Hiti were put on show at Al-Riwaq Gallery, Baghdad. In his works, Al-Hiti drew themes from such ancient Iraqi symbols as the date-palm and the Lion of Babylon.

On the first week of September the 15th one-man art exhibition of Ajil Mizhir, an artist from Basra, was held at Al-Riwaq Gallery, Baghdad. He displayed 35 works of art which highlight his multiple skills. His work is a blend of painting, etching and sculpture.

In September, a group exhibition was held at Al-Riwaq Gallery, Baghdad to observe the sixth anniversary of the Iraq-Iran war. The exhibition which was organised by the Department of Art, Ministry of Information and Culture displayed works of art by leading artists such as Hafez al-Doroubi, Ismail al-Sheikhli, Mohammed Ghani Hikmat, Ala' Bashir and Faraj Abbu. Iraq's six-year fight against Iran's aggression has inspired these artists who have reacted under a strong emotional

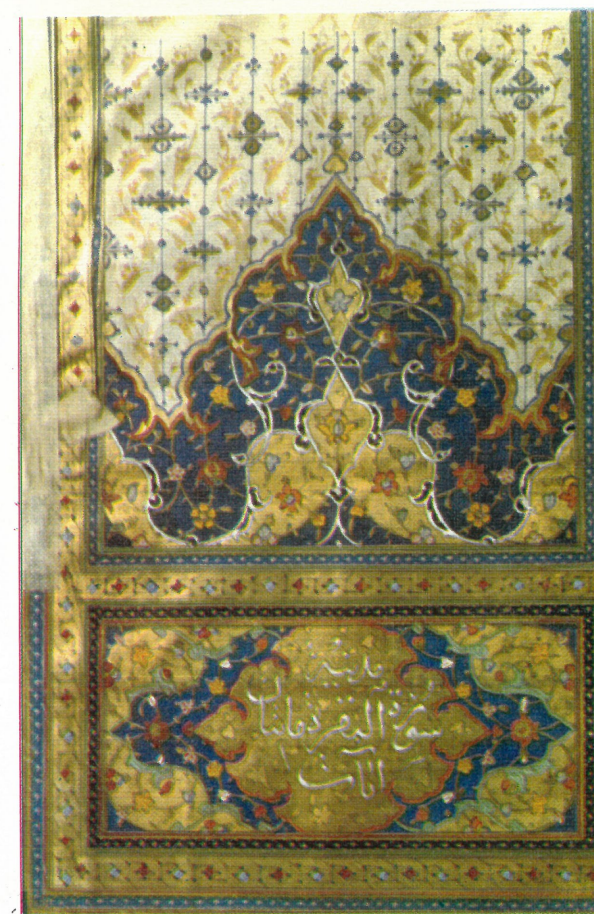
impact, and thus produced splendid works of art treating the theme of war. Their works covered the feats of the gallant Iraqi soldiers, martyrs, and scenes from the battlefield.

Many other exhibitions tackling the theme of war were also held. The Department of Political Guidance, Ministry of Defence held an exhibition for artist-soldiers. The exhibition had on display 140 paintings, 61 ceramic works, 20 sculptures and some calligraphy pieces. The exhibits were a good example of the works of art produced during war time by artist-soldiers.

The first ever one-man exhibition to be held at Saddam's Art Centre was that of Dr Khalid al-Qassab and was opened in September. The works on display included a collection representing various stages of his life. Dr Khalid al-Qassab started painting in the 1940s and he is one of contemporary art pioneers like Jawad Salim, Faiq Hassan, Hafez al-Doroubi and Atta Sabri. His paintings deal mostly with nature in Iraq. He has painted trees, mountains and rivers and has remained faithful to this style until today.

To continue its activities on the sixth anniversary of the Iraq-Iran war, the Department of Art, Ministry of Information and Culture held a political poster exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art. Eighty-six posters by sixty artists were put on show. The theme of posters focused on condemning Iran's maltreatment of Iraqi prisoners of war. Among the artists who participated in this exhibition were Ala' Bashir, Mohammed Mahr-el-Din, Mukhalad al-Mukhtar, Bahija al-Hakim and Ayad al-Husseini.

Four leading Egyptian cartoonists took part in condemning the Iranian aggression by displaying their works in Baghdad to mark the sixth anniversary of Iran's aggression against Iraq, September 4, 1980. The artists Ahmed Toghan, Taha Ibrahim al-Adawi, Jum'a Farhan and Ra'uf Iyad displayed cartoons reflecting the Egyptian public opinion regarding the Iraq-Iran war.



*A manuscript from an exhibition by Antiquity Department*



*A painting by Mohammed Muhr-el-din*



## Dramatists and film-makers inspired by Iraq's fight

The theme of war has become familiar to many Iraqi playwrights who have promptly responded to this new phase in the life of Iraqis.

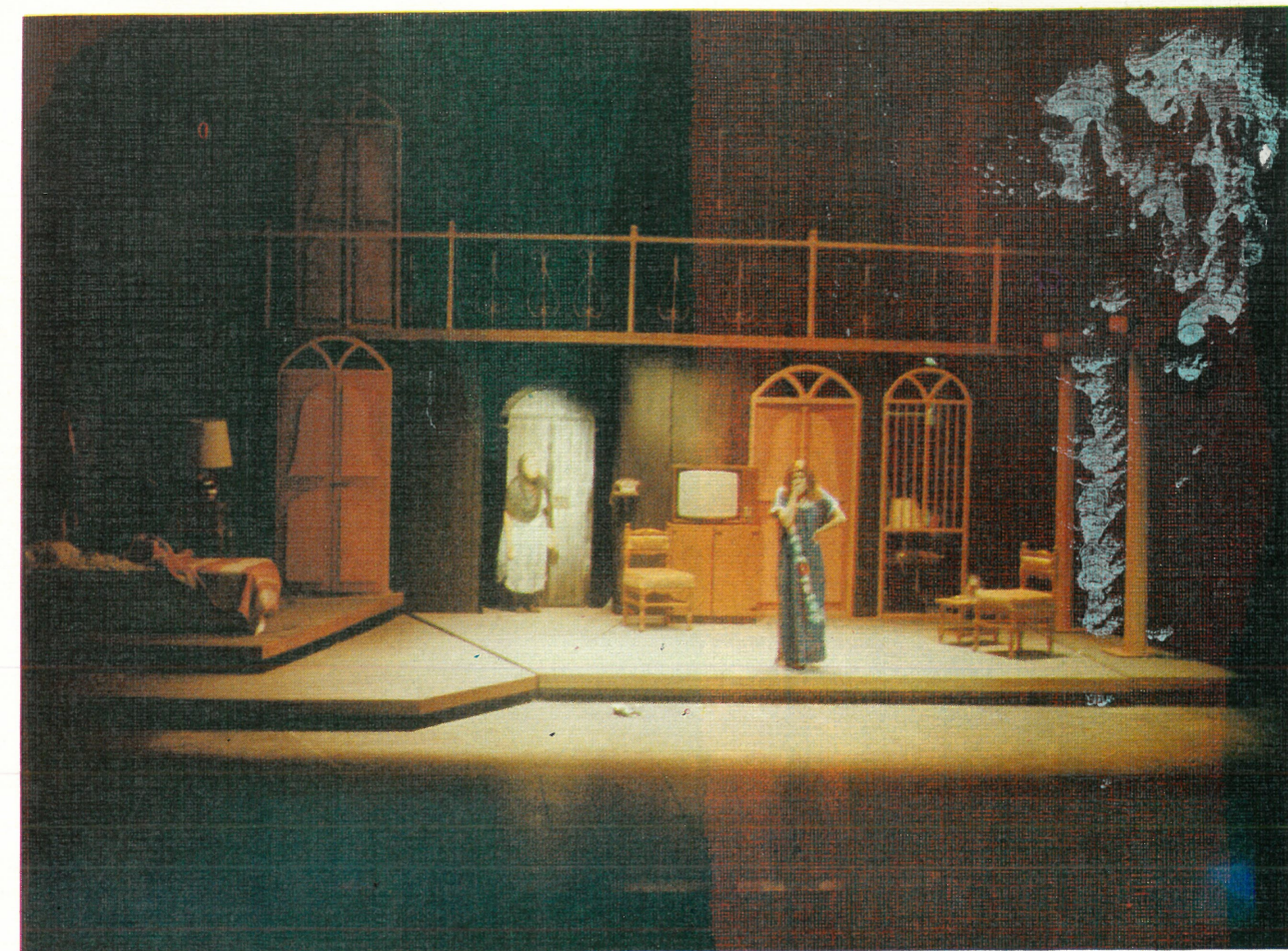
To mark the sixth anniversary of the Iraq-Iran war, the Cinema and Theatre Authority prepared a special programme dealing with the theme of war.

On September 22, the Minister of Information and Culture, Mr Latif Nsayyif Jassim attended the premiere of *Al-Awda* (The Return), a play written by Yousif al-Saigh and directed by Qassim Mohammed.

Yousif al-Saigh, a distinguished contemporary Iraqi poet, had his first play *Al-Bab* (The Door) staged earlier. *Al-Awda* added more to his reputa-

tion as a playwright. This play touches upon a critical situation at the time of war. The theme deals with a soldier, Mahmud Abdul Abbas, who deserts his post at war time and goes home at night searching for refuge among his kith and kin. To his amazement, he finds that even his wife, Hadeel Kamel, does not approve of his shameful act. She tries her best to make her husband rejoin his unit.

Sami Abdul Hamid, actor, director, playwright and lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts contributed to the war effort through *Faseel ala Tariq al-Ma'd* (A Platoon on the Road to Glory), a play based on war short stories portraying the life of a number of soldiers in their trenches facing the



*The Return was received with wide acclaim*

enemy lines.

In September, the Basra Theatre Company restaged *Hikaya Sha'biya* (A Popular Tale) in a number of southern provinces. The play was written by Shakir al-Attar and directed by Nassir Awda to support war efforts. The theme deals with the role of Iraqi women in encountering Iranian aggression. The play staged for the first time in Basra in 1985.

Other themes were also tackled on stage. In September Nineveh Theatre Company presented *Zaffat Urus* (Wedding Party) at Al-Rabi' Theatre Hall in Mosul. The play which was written by Fadhil Sabbar and directed by Jalal Jamil, simply tells the story of an old residential quarter which would be replaced by modern blocks of flats. The new flats would be distributed to the old inhabitants of the quarters.

Earlier this year, the play *Al-Mit-hana* (The Mill) was staged in Baghdad theatres by the Military Theatre Company and was considered as a promising work. In September, the play was restaged at Ibn al-Athir Theatre in Mosul where it received great acclaim. The theme deals with a number of characters whose dreams, ambitions, success and failure, and struggle are related to the mill. The play was

written by young playwright, Abdul Amir Shamkhi, and directed by Muhsin al-Ali.

Iraqi film-makers have also been inspired by the Iraqis' fight against Iran's aggression. In recent years, they have employed the war experience in documentary as well as feature films. Many of these films have been shot by cameramen of the Cinema and Theatre Authority and of the Radio and Television Authority, in cooperation with the Department of Political Guidance at the Ministry of Defence.

Among films dealing with the Iraqis' defence of their country is *Al-Hudoud al-Multahiba* (The Burning Frontiers), directed by Sahib Haddad and written by Qassim Mohammed. The film depicts the bravery of Iraqi fighters in encountering the Iranian aggression, and shows how the Iraqi people carry on working to maintain the development of their country.

Another film was *Al-Munafithon* (Those who carry out daring tasks) directed by Abdul Hadi al-Rawi. The film tells the story of a group of Iraqi fighters who are ordered to blow up a depot inside the Iranian territory.



*A scene from The Return*





*The Burning Frontiers, a film based on the Iraq-Iran war*

This film was followed by *Sakhab al-Bahr* (The Fury of the Sea) which was directed by Sahib Abdul Karim. The theme of the film is based on a novel by Ali Khayoun showing an operation by an Iraqi naval unit to destroy five Iranian boats in a single day.



*Fury of the Sea another film dealing with the Iraq-Iran war*

The most successful documentary film was *Al-Shaheed Akramuna* (The Martyr is the Noblest), directed by Abdul Hadi al-Rawi. The idea of the film is about two Iraqi fighters who risk their lives to evacuate the body of an Iraqi martyr from a forward

position in the battlefield.

*Fusoul min Qadissiyat Saddam* (Chapters from the Battle of Saddam's Qadissiya) and *Limatha al-Harb* (Why the War?) were two other documentaries directed by Sahib Haddad. Both films are based on TV coverage of the battle against Iran's aggression.

Social themes have also been tackled by film-makers. Recently Babel Company for Cinema and TV Production produced a feature film entitled *Hamad wa-Humoud*. The film which is a love story that takes place in the country, was written by Ibrahim al-Basri and directed by Ibrahim Jalal. Another feature film *Hub fi Baghdad* (Love in Baghdad) was recently produced by the Cinema and Theatre Authority. This film was written by Salim al-Basri and directed by Abdul Hadi al-Rawi.

*Al-Muhimma Mustamirra* (The Mission is on), directed by Mohammed Shukri Jamil was also a documentary film which highlights the bravery of the personnel of the Iraqi Air Force during the war. The film tells a true story of an Iraqi pilot whose plane was shot down inside the Iranian territory but managed to return to Iraq with the help of Kurdish

people.

On the sixth anniversary of the start of war in September, Baghdad TV presented *Risas fil Janib al-Akher* (Shooting on the other Side), a documentary directed by Salah Karam. The film presents the feats scored by some Iraqi fighters during the battles of the marshes when the Iranians tried to invade Iraq through the marshes in southern Iraq.

In July, the Iraqi Club for Cinema resumed its activities by showing *A Passage to India*, directed by David Lane. Every week the Club presents either an Arabic or a foreign film for its members and guests at the Artists Club in Mansur.

Iraq participated in the Cairo International Cinema Festival and the Second Arab Documentary Film Festival, held on October 6. At the first festival Iraq showed two films *Hub Fi Baghdad* (Love in Baghdad) and *Sakhab al-Bahr* (The Roar of the Sea). At the second Festival Iraq participated with eight documentary films reflecting the Iraqi feats over the Iranian army, and others depicting cultural development in Iraq after the July 17, 1968 Revolution.



*The Twins, a popular play*



## Musical activities

The Music Department at the Ministry of Information and Culture, established fourteen years ago, has endeavoured ever since to develop music in Iraq. In 1986 a number of activities were carried out by this Department. Between April 26-30 the 4th Baghdad International Music Conference was held under the theme "Music for the Child, Music for Peace." The Conference focused on enhancing children musical education. A Musical festival followed the Conference. Artists from some forty-six countries sang for peace and friendship.

Within the celebrations of July 17, 1968 Revolution and the sixth anniversary of Saddam's Qadissiya battle on September 4, 1980, the Music Department prepared a special programme for these two occasions. In September the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra gave a special performance at the National Theatre. A new concert entitled "Order of Bravery" which is based on the bravery and the feats of Iraqi fighters in encountering the Iranian enemy was presented.

Beatrice Ohannesian, the Iraqi pianist played four concerts. She composed one of them herself under the theme "Allegiance to President Saddam Hussein."

The Music Department founded a new ensemble under the name "Al-Bayariq". The ensemble uses traditional instruments such as the Oud (Lute), the Qanun, the Nay (flute) the Santur and the Jawzah. This is in addition to percussion instruments like tabliah, riqq, naqqareh and kheshabi.

The players whose age varies between 15-25 are amateurs from the Institute of Melodic Studies and the School of Music and Ballet in Baghdad. Between June 15 and September 15 they had four-hour

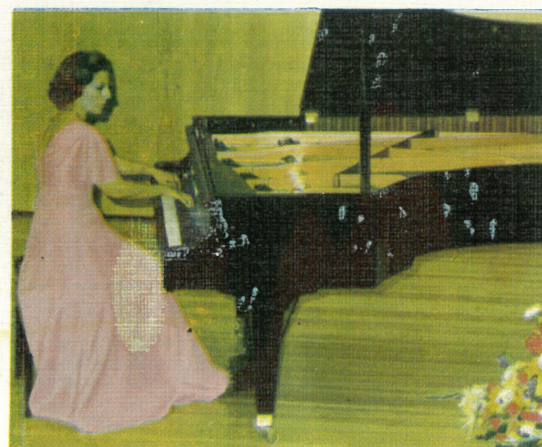
training courses every day. This qualified "Al-Bayariq" to present its first concert in July to celebrate the 18th anniversary of the Revolution. The Music Department also recorded Iraqi and Arab music played by this ensemble on audio and video cassettes.

Mr Munir Bashir, Oud virtuoso and Director General of the Music Department has been active in introducing Iraqi music to Arab and foreign audience abroad. He attended the VII International Tchaikovsky Competition which opened in Moscow on June 13. The competition included piano, violin and cello performances in addition to solo singing. Iraq took part for the first time in this competition with violinist Aram Zaratsian, a graduate of the School of Music and Ballet in Baghdad and a student of violin at Tchaikovsky Conservatoire in Kiev, Ukraine. During the festival, Mr Munir Bashir delivered a lecture on Iraqi music and its relation to the music of the southern republics of the Soviet Union.

In Summer he gave a concert of Oud in Tunisia. Mr Munir Bashir was also invited in October to give two concerts at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. Moreover he gave two other concerts in London.

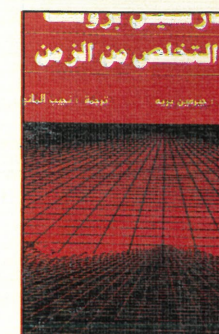
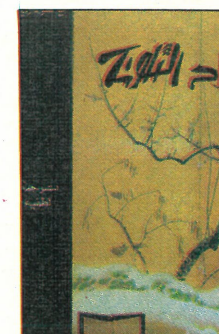
Future plans of the Music Department include organising the Babylon Festival in September 1987, which will be held at the ancient city of Babylon. Many celebrated musicians will take part in this festival.

In London, Al-Basra Company for Folk Music gave a concert in July at the Iraqi Cultural Centre before Arab and British audience. The music and songs of southern Iraq were received warmly.



Beatrice Ohannesian: four concerts

## New books and other publications



The Iraqi cultural scene is marked by a boom in the publishing industry. A large number of books on various subjects is published by many Iraqi publishers. The two major cultural departments, Dar al-Ma'mun for Translation and Publishing and Cultural Affairs Department which are affiliated to the Ministry of Information and Culture, have made a considerable contribution to this boom.

Dar al-Ma'mun has published during the period from July 1 to November 1, eleven books in foreign languages dealing with various topics related to Iraqi politics. In the same period it has also published four literary books translated into Arabic. The books are *Art and Science* by Dolf Rieser translated by Dr Salman al-Wasiti, *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino, translated from English by Yassin Taha Hafidh, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, translated by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and *Snow Country* by Yasunari Kawabata translated from English by Lutfiya al-Dilemi.

Cultural Affairs Department has issued 460 books in the first ten months of 1986. The books recently published may be put under the following headings: poetry, fiction, research, small encyclopaedia and various translated books.

In poetry, 25 collections of poems were issued during the last period. Yassin Taha Hafidh's poetry

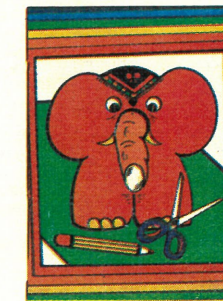
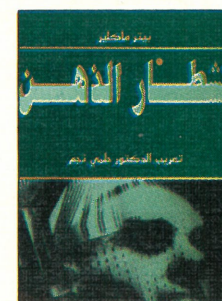
anthology, *Flowers Wither... Thoughts Rise* is one of many poetry books issued recently. Mu'ad al-Jibouri's anthology *This is My Contest* was also published. The themes of its poems are derived from the war. The poet has tried in his works to evoke the bright chapters of ancient Arab history.

On the other hand, thirty five short story collections were published in the past few months. The Iraqi short story writer, Musa Kreidi's forth collection *The Skies of Spirit* was published recently. The stories deal with the world of childhood.

As for the research and translated books, we may refer to some volumes published recently such as the one entitled *Poets as Critics* by Dr Abdul Jabbar al-Mutta'lebi. This book shows how poet-critics give their judgements about the literary works of their contemporaries. The book takes up the literary contributions after the advent of Islam and during the Umayyad era.

*Al-Aqlam* magazine issued two books. One of them deals with a number of critical studies on the short stories and novels that appeared between 1980 and 1985. This book is edited by two Iraqi writers, A'id Khasbak and Ahmed Khalaf.

The translated books have also a great share in the total number of books published. The poet Yassin Taha Hafidh translated some poems of seven well-





known poets who lived during the First World War. The translator has made a remarkable effort to convey the rich poetical worlds of Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Edward Thomas, Eugenie Montale, Guiseppe Ungaretti, George Traki and August Stramm to the Arab reader. Another book on prose criticism and its methods has been translated into Arabic by professor Dr Isam al-Khatib and Dr Tawfiq Abdullah.

The Small Encyclopaedia series has produced twenty-seven books in various fields of knowledge. Among the latest publications, is a book entitled *Chapters from Arab Scientific Legacy* by Sabih Sadiq. As far as the scientific contributions are concerned one can mention Dr Sabiha al-Dabbagh's useful book *Simplified Medical Studies*. It includes texts on ways of treating different diseases. Meanwhile, Ghanim Mahmoud's translation entitled *On the Rise and Development of Opera* is a useful book which introduces the reader to this kind of art.

By the end of this year the number of books published by the Department is expected to reach 512.

The Children's Culture Department during the last four months has published 35 books on various subjects for children of various age groups. The Department issues 12 series of books, each dealing with a specific field. The most interesting books published during this period are *Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor* by Abdul Rahman Tuhmazi and *Al-Quds (Jerusalem)* by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra in the *Golden Heritage Series*. *The Life of President Saddam Hussein* is the title of another book in the *History Series* by Ma'd Fayadh. Under the heading *Series for the Future*, Farooq Seloom, Director General of the Children's Culture Department wrote *The Time of Ideas*.

Another interesting book is *The Migrating Street* by Karim al-Iraqi from the *Story Series*. It tells the history of one of the oldest streets in Baghdad. The *Hobbies Series* is intended to teach children how to make useful things from materials available around the house.

A book entitled *Do It Yourself* shows children how to make animals and flowers from paper cuttings. The other series are the *Pre-School Age Series*, *The Scientific Series*, *The Scientific Fiction Series*, *My Homeland Series*, *The Folklore Series*, *The Poetry Series*, *The Translated Books Series* and *The Heroes Series*.

On the other hand, a symposium on joint Arab publishing was held in Baghdad from September 8-10 to discuss the possibility of launching a joint publishing project by several publishing houses in the Arab world.

A number of papers were discussed about relations among publishers. Representatives of various Arab publishing houses discussed the distribution of

Arabic books in all parts of the Arab world.

The symposium also dealt with the selection of books. After due consideration, it was decided that a committee of experts selects books of high quality to be published or re-published.

In the field of joint publishing, the Egyptian General Commission for Books, Cairo, the Moroccan Al-Maghrib Publishing House and Tobaqal Publishing House, together with the Cultural Affairs Department have published twenty-three books of various topics and issues.

The followings are some of the publications: *The Philosophy of Aesthetics*, by Dr Amira Helmi, *Definition of Cinematic Criticism*, by Dr Ali Shalash, *Folk Tales* by Dr Abdul Hamid Younis, *The Arabs and the European Civilization* by Mohammad Mufid Ash-Shobashi, *The Lost Paradise*, by John Milton (Volume 1), translated and introduced by Dr Mohammad A'nani, *Problems of Energy and Technology in Developing Countries*, by Engineer Abdullah A'shur, *Tomorrow and the Rage* (A Novel), by Khanatah Banunah.

During the period July 1 to November 1, Iraqi Universities have published 205 theses and dissertations. These include 60 covering various specializations in engineering, 46 on humanities, 27 on medicine, 19 on planning, administration and economy and 53 on science and agriculture.

Moreover, Iraqi universities as part of their educational programmes have published numerous text books on various subjects written by university professors.







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